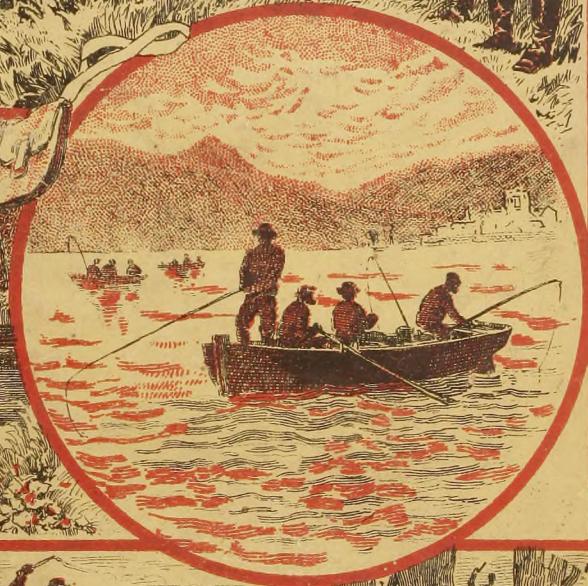
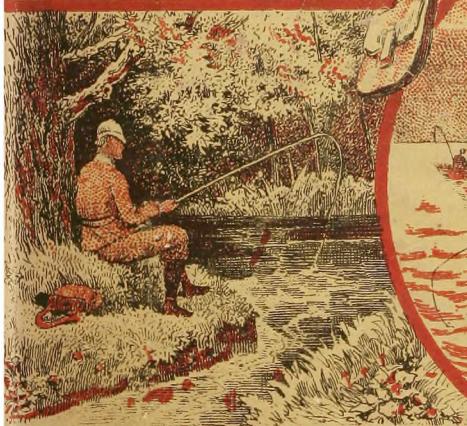
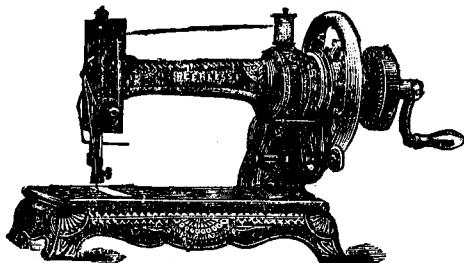




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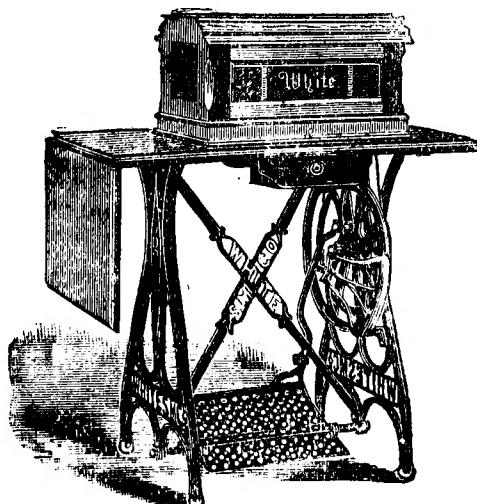
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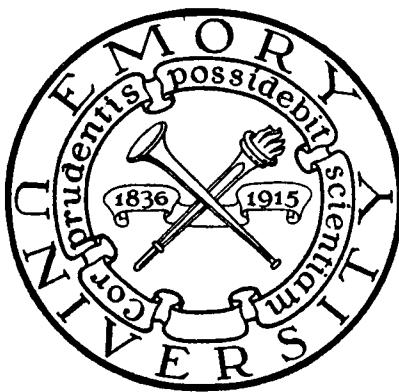
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# NEAR AND FAR

*AN ANGLER'S SKETCHES*

OF

*HOME SPORT AND COLONIAL LIFE*

BY

WILLIAM SENIOR  
(“*Red Spinner*”)

ANGLING EDITOR OF THE “FIELD;” AUTHOR OF “WATERSIDE SKETCHES;”  
“BY STREAM AND SEA;” “TRAVEL AND TROUT IN THE ANTI-  
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## PREFATORY NOTE.



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W. S.



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# NEAR AND FAR.

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## Part I.

### *SKETCHES OF HOME SPORT.*

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#### CHAPTER I.

##### ON THE FAITH OF A PARAGRAPH.

SPRING fishing was everywhere bad, and the only mitigating thing about it was this—the prospects were so hopeless that anglers generally refused to place themselves within reach of disappointment. They remained at home, hoping for better times, wondering if that terrible east wind would *ever* blow itself out, and the waters receive purgement and replenishment from warm rain and wholesome flood.

The experienced man would know to a nicety what to expect after a month's cold east wind, with scarcely a shower of rain. He would count his chances, and with mathematical precision pronounce them *nil*. An east wind of itself is enough to discourage; but when to it must be added water crystal clear, and at its minimum depth, the data upon which to build a forecast are complete. And this was the state of affairs in the spring to which I refer.

No more will the east wind of the British Islands find friendly apologist in me. I now know him for the ruffian that he is. Formerly, if I did not hail him, or pretend to hail him, as a fine roystering sort of fellow, I

certainly did not join in the popular execrations which greet his blusterings; nay, might even, in presence of some acquaintance whom he had nipped, have touched him up with faint praise. He had never harmed me, nor inconvenienced. Personally I bore no grudge. But I link myself here and now with the great Galileo and the great Cranmer: I make public recantation.

Coming across the Bay of Biscay towards the end of March, after an absence in climes where the east wind is a welcome guest, we naturally looked for the fag end of the Equinoctials. To our astonishment, the dreaded Bay was calm and quiet; calm by lack of wind, and quiet because the dark waters were not troubled by the famous swell which so often, even when the weather is fair, makes you sickly sad in those latitudes.

But running away from Ushant one night, we met an easterly gale which roared in our teeth all the way up channel, and, spite of bright sunshine, cut into our marrow-bones. Within four-and-twenty hours of landing, that east wind caused me to take part in a melancholy duty in Brompton Cemetery. An elderly relative coming into town from Kew, had turned the corner of a West-End street: a furious gust met him, knocked off his hat, and tore open his overcoat. The hat was soon recovered and the coat rebuttoned, but my poor friend had in that brief space of time received a death-grip which in three days accomplished its fell work. Small matter by comparison with this was the suffering of those of us new from the lands of the sun—the influenza, the doctor's stuff, the despair of ever again feeling hopeful and warm. But it enters into the indictment with the rest, and warrants a charge of ruffianism—treacherous, merciless ruffianism—against the east wind.

Down in Westminster, one cold gloomy morning, an angling conclave met at breakfast, for the express purpose of talking trout. One had just come from Devonshire, reporting dismally of the prospects of sport there. Derbyshire? Worse still. Ireland, too far: Scotland, the same. For certain choice streams, preserved, but accessible perhaps as a favour, the season was too early; for any stream, in short, the conditions were in the highest degree unfavourable. The meeting, so agreeing without division, threw its cigar-ends into the grate, and scattered. For myself, I had a charge to keep. For a couple of months I had determined upon a bit of spring troutting. In tropical seas, as the good ship pounded on, day and night, nor'-west-and-by-nor' (more or less), approaching every twenty-four hours some three hundred miles nearer home, the determination was not weakened. East wind or none, this troutting had to be tried.

After watching the weathercock daily on fourteen successive mornings and evenings, and finding the dragon's head of the vane obstinate between north and east, there came a Sunday morning when, peering through the Venetian blinds, I found the smoke from the chimney over the way telling a cheering tale in its own dumb fashion. The wind had shifted a few points south of west, and blew without a sting, steady and genial. The auspicious moment had arrived for hasty preparations and a prompt start. The preparations were soon made—rod, winch, fly-books, landing stick and net, wading gear. It is always best to tick them off on the fingers. Nothing makes a man look so sheepish as to unpack his materials by riverside, perhaps hundreds of miles from home, and discover that everything has been provided with elaborate care, even to scissors, pliers, thread, and indiarubber for straightening out the cast—everything but the winch and line.

Preparations made, there arose a rather important question. To what place shall I go? The morning's *Field* lay on the table. Now, the reader had better understand at once that the angler who shapes his movements by paragraphic inspirations must take his chance of being disappointed. The paragraphs are occasionally misleading by accident; there is no reason for thinking design to be other than a very rare occurrence.

Taking up the paper, then, I made up my mind that if nothing eligible offered in its pages, I would betake me to the Yorkshire wolds, in whose brooks I had been assured plenty of small trout were to be taken. The telegraphic news was discouraging enough, in all conscience. It would be so as a matter of course, the wind on the previous day being in its worst quarter. "Not a fly of any kind on the river yesterday." I should opine not, indeed. This was the Test. "River very low and clear. Wind north-east, fish not rising." So much 'for the Usk. It was a model statement; a complete essay leading up to a severely logical conclusion. The Yore and Swale, with my wolds scheme simmering, interested me most. The telegram evidently was evasive, but there could be no mistaking its meaning: "Weather keeps dreadfully cold—very few natural flies on the water—surface anglers doing next to nothing—good dish of trout is a rarity," &c. &c. Such were the salient features of the announcement.

This being a sample of the very latest intelligence, it seemed idle to turn to that valuable column of angling records, "Notes and Queries." Yet a paragraph, side-headed "*The Verniew (Montgomeryshire)*," attracted my attention, and I soon considered it studiously. It referred to another paragraph in a previous number, and that, unearthed, expressed wonder why the Verniew was never mentioned as an open river, and gave some definite in-

formation that seemed sterling. Returning to the later copy of the paper, I found two paragraphs from different correspondents, and they agreed in their statements that the trout were small, but plentiful ; that permission was easy to obtain, where the water was not open ; and that the accommodation was good. What finally settled me was the sentence :—“The only reason I can assign for its being so little known is that it is rather inconvenient to reach.” The very place. Anglers sometimes are a trifle selfish : exclusive, perhaps, is the more accurate expression. Llanfair was “so little known.” This decided me, and per nine-something train from Euston, to Llanfair I booked.

In the small hours, in a deserted railway-station dark and dreary, pacing up and down, I discovered a fishing-basket and rods amongst somebody’s luggage waiting to go on with the train into Wales.

We resumed our travels soon after the pale dawn had chased part of the gloom from the station (at Shrewsbury it is not at the best of times a place for hilarity), and, as a matter of course, the bearer of my fishing-basket found himself occupying a carriage with the owner of that other basket. Somehow, these fishing-baskets by a silent and unassisted process do often gravitate towards each other in this friendly manner. The owner was accompanied by a bright-eyed young lad, to whom that midnight journey, with fishing at its terminus, was evidently an adventure to be spoiled by neither cold nor hunger.

We did not exchange visiting-cards, but we did exchange paragraphs snipped from the *Field*. We had sped on our errands under the same monitorship of the morning. Mine, as I have explained, was sending me to Llanfair : his was taking him to the Artog Hall Hotel, between Dolgelly and Barmouth. We wished each other good luck

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at Welshpool, at which station I left the train, nevertheless half-minded to abandon Llanfair, and proceed with my newly-made acquaintances, who might have sea-fishing and a yacht at their disposal—a most valuable *dernier ressort* at all times for the land sportsman.

After a night journey, with wearisome stoppages at indifferently appointed stations, it is not the most enjoyable of things to be deposited in a small country town before it is astir. How cold it was, too, for April! Yet, it might have been fancy. The blackbirds and thrushes, bless them, were making music *fortissimo* in the shrubberies, and I listened to them with an appreciation peculiar to any country-loving person who has not heard them, or their tribe, for years. The shutters were up, which, it being Sunday and in Wales, was not surprising; but the butt-end of the fishing-rod, freely applied to the front door, in a reasonable space of time brought down a ruddy-armed damsel to open the hotel.

“Pool,” as the natives call their town, is a quiet, comfortable-looking place, as the country towns go, with a canal, and the usual public buildings. At some period, I suspect, it has been trying, on its smaller scale, to assimilate itself to Shrewsbury, which is but a score of miles distant, and no doubt to many of the inhabitants the highest type of what civilization can produce in the shape of a city.

A climb up the side of the very steep churchyard gave me a fine view of the neighbourhood, which, by reason of Powys Park, and other country seats, is far above the average of rural beauty. The ever sweet clanging of the Sunday bells continued during breakfast-time, and at their call the town, by eight o’clock, was evincing incipient tokens of waking up. The rattle of our waggonette-wheels sounded hollow and startling at that peaceful hour, and cottagers

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appeared at window and door to scan the novelty. On weekdays there is a coach to Llanfair, but on Sundays you have to remain in Welshpool, or indulge in the luxury of posting.

A lovely drive of nine miles brings you to Llanfair. The road for the most part runs along the side of a slope. On the other side of the valley you have the park surrounding "Red Castle," the baronial residence of the Earl of Powys, of this part the respected magnate. In these days, when suburbs of unadulterated streets by the score call themselves parks, I ought perhaps to explain, in the language of the driver of my waggonette, "Yes, sir, this is a park, and no mistake." It is the kind of domain where the gnarled trees can reckon their age by centuries; the deer have miles of varied roamage-land; the woods stretch away out of ken; and the wanderer may everywhere discover sylvan thickets and dells.

But the spring was late in coming. The vernal advance was much more delayed than in Southern England. The hedges were displaying their tender leaflets, and waxen buds tipped the branches of trees. In the hedgerows, too common for rifling by the children, masses of primroses of the largest petal and daintiest colour stood clear out from the strong leaves, from which, save at the zenith of their maturity, they love to seek protection. The fields were gay with buttercups and amazing patches of full-blown daffodils. The woods as yet had no leaves, and the only approach to green was upon the young larches, cultivated in these parts upon every available space, to supply the coal-pits with props.

Not here will I pour out my praise of the larch, the herald of spring in the plantation, as the violet, primrose, and anemone are in the hedgerow. The wind may pierce and rave defiance, but when the larch puts forth

that wonderful green which belongs to itself, you may read a sure promise that winter is as good as gone. The other trees had no tint other than that which is so hard to describe, but which is so characteristic of the time of the year. The late William Sawyer, in one of his musical poems, does however describe it thoroughly in the line :

“The wine-dark masses of the wood.”

The oak woods in Powys Park on that Sunday morning seemed as if they had been washed in red wine. I know that purple tint well. It will change very rapidly, for it always appears just before the shooting of the leaves.

For the latter half of our journey the river ran in the valley, often overhung by the woods, not often violently broken, but distinguished by an even ripple that would at sight commend it to the angler. Crossing a bridge, I saw a salmon break some distance up the stream, and then learned that, if the salmon are not numerous, some are taken every season.

Llanfair is too small to rank as a town, and too large to be dubbed a village. Homely as it is in itself, the immediate surroundings are very picturesque, of the Welsh order of picturesqueness, when it is a portion of the Principality that is well wooded. The river Banw—a branch of the Verniew, which is a branch of the Severn—runs through the place. You cross it by a bridge on entering the lower part of the town, and, by the narrow street, get high above it in a few minutes.

From the inn-window glimpses of the river might be seen. The angler on his roamings should always be quartered, when possible, in a room from which he can see the water if he be so minded. Angling pictures on the wall may at a push serve as a substitute, but for comforting,

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soothing, inspiring, and encouraging the angler, there is nothing so effective as the close vicinity of a stream ; and if it makes itself heard, be it only a murmur, its power is much enhanced. It will enter into his dreams. In the morning, in slippered ease, when his bosom is full of hope of what the day, viewed through the meshes of the landing-net, may bring, he will nod a recognition before equipping himself for his excursion. At eventide, luxuriously tired in his arm-chair, reviewing, with such heart as the amount of spoil will regulate, what has been done, seen, said, and felt during the day's sport, he will soon learn to detect the faintest change in the never-ceasing undertone, and hope or despair afresh.

A Sunday-afternoon stroll down to the weir, where a few idlers dangled their feet over the rocky river-bed, dis-couraging of a phenomenal trout seen the day before by workmen making repairs, and up the stream through the meadow and wood pathways, convinced me that there were no flies about. East wind again, I suppose ! The fly which dances so madly over the gravel, from which it takes its name, ought to have been out in swarms. It is the favourite spring fly here, but here it was not. Nor was the ghost of a March brown to be found, nor the pretty iron-blue dun which loves to tower in the air, poising itself perpendicularly on its tail till it is out of sight. At odd hours of calmness and sunshine during the week I saw solitary specimens ; but I believe the fly famine lasted till the middle of May.

On my first fishing morning of course the wind was in the north again, with west and east alternately striving to put in a flavour, but with the most contemptible result. The clouds were low on the hills, woolly and slate-hued. Still, there was a day's work to be done, and any angler is aware that eight hours' steady fly-fishing, wading, now over

ridges of slate, now over large boulders slippery by lengthy surcease of flood, and often throwing a long line across a foul wind, is verily hard work. You earn your fish, and you earn it by the sweat of your brow. The day's work in my case was sweetened by eight trout, or one trout per hour. The fish were small, say five to the pound, and not in good condition. Yet they were game and went for the March brown honourably. To complain of the modest sum total, made the most of on a willow-pattern dish by an artistic cushion of graceful young fern-fronds, would not be fair, seeing that it exceeded any estimate founded upon the morning's careful calculations. I did not observe a fish rise all the day. The water was so clear that, when the bank and bushes were favourable, you could see every pebble at the bottom for a considerable distance, but there was not a trout visible.

The fish were at home, which, to the fishermen, means, too truly, not at home. It does so happen sometimes, and all that is left is to call again, and again, even to seventy-times seven, until you are favoured with an interview. If the samlet had been trout, my dish would have numbered fifty brace at the lowest computation. The voracious samlet, with its frosted silver vesture slashed by delicate bars, is a pretty object, but, for all that, a downright nuisance. At every throw, often two at a time, regardless of the size or description of fly, it was nothing but samlets from four to five inches long. They wore out one fly completely. The shallow streams must have literally swarmed with samlets.

The dismay of a sharp little Welsh boy, who was installed as henchman during my stay, was ludicrous when he found that the samlet were to be returned to the water. He was too naturally polite to speak his thoughts, but he was fearfully depressed when once he had overcome his original

incredulity. This mental condition he arrived at after the return of some half-dozen, and when he was convinced that the infant salmon had not accidentally slipped out of my fingers. Then he tried the artful dodge, and would encouragingly, and with an admirable simulation of glee, exclaim, as a very pronounced samlet wriggled on the line, "Nice little trout, sir."

By-and-by the boy opened his mind, and gradually was wheedled into telling me that the native fishermen of the poorer class hold potted samlet to be a toothsome dish, as in truth it is. No doubt the people habitually kill the samlet, and they adopt other destructive methods for obtaining fish that should be stopped. They wire the trout, net them, and pursue an extensive system of tickling. Worm-fishing probably cannot be prohibited, and as there are two or three old men who get a living by the sale of trout, perhaps this method may be overlooked. But I never saw a river where the holes and deep runs, when it is low, were more favourable to worm-fishing. After a while, in consequence, I gave up seeking trout in the precise spots where good ones would lie; it was plain that the worm would be used in them by the knowing natives, and the fish being not "on the move," the place of the captured veteran would not be quickly taken again by that other veteran that is always supposed to be ready to possess it. The evil is stated to be diminishing, but the fee of a shilling for a trout and char licence will not be a restraint. I had the gratification myself of destroying two night-lines, in pursuance of the principle that, while the angler need not be a spy, he should always be an amateur keeper.

In the sitting-room of the inn, returning in the gloaming, I found a corner table strewed with a rod-bag, spare tops, and other evidences of a newly-arrived companion. He soon

came back with two or three trout. We smiled at each other.

“*Field* paragraph?” I asked laconically.

“Yes,” he replied.

The young gentleman had taken the bait as I had. There were four of us now abroad on the faith of a paragraph. Right glad had I reason to be, however, that the new-comer had done so, for the accident gave me a delightful companion. He was an Oxford undergraduate, recovering from illness, desiring a quiet corner for repose, and a handy stream for his favourite recreation. He was supposed by his friends to be “reading,” and I never saw a youth so steadily stick to his book—fly-book. The pure air and wholesome fare did him a world of good, and though, wading being impossible for him, he was at a discount with the trout, he agreed with me that the scenery made ample amends, and was satisfied.

There are several streams and brooks within a few miles of Llanfair. Flies may be procured from local makers, and there is an iron-blue dun which should never be left off the cast in the spring. Nor, indeed, should the March brown.

A second day’s hard work gave me ten brace and a half of trout, the largest of which should have plumped the scales at three-quarters of a pound, yet he was only half a pound, and a consumptive-looking creature at that. The day was, for a wonder, warm, showery, and dull, and the fish were mostly picked out from the broader portions of the river, where the stream was from one to two feet deep, and flowing with even undulations. The wind enabled one to wade stealthily up in the middle and cast straight ahead with a comparatively short line; and a very artistic fashion this is, if the angler can keep it up. By three o’clock in the afternoon the position became all at once untenable, owing to a change of wind from the cold quarter, and for

the rest of the week similar good luck did not return. Still, I did in five days contrive to kill twenty-five brace and a half of sizeable trout, and leave more or less of a mark upon innumerable samlets daily.

The slaying of thirteen chub one morning with a March brown afforded me as much sport as gratification. The big-headed chevin is as objectionable in a trout stream as any of the coarser fish that prey upon their kind, and no consideration of time or season should stay the fisherman's hand. Then, too, the sport was so totally unexpected. I had driven over to the river at Pont Robert, and had carefully fished up-stream without touching a trout. Above a primitive weir there stretched perhaps a quarter of a mile of wood overhanging the water, which swept, by a gentle curve, under a high bank, and was in places unusually deep and broad. Making a stand in the middle of the river, the fly was despatched on a trial trip of little short of fifteen yards, over an eddy where, if anywhere, it seemed that there would be a trout poising. Something by-and-by came with a rush, but more suggestive of a small pike or large dace than trout.

On feeling the fish, I knew exactly what its breed was: chub for a ducat. It proved to be, in fact, a chub of about a pound weight; and, of course, not far from the spot from which it had been enticed, there would be others of the same sort. By keeping quiet and never losing a fish; by getting your captive away from the general convocation without floundering on the surface; by avoiding the fatal mistake of pricking a short-rising fish; and by never so much as moving a leg as you stand with the stream meandering softly by your knees—you are almost certain, with chub on the rise, to catch on till there is nothing left to catch. Following those mental directions, I was kept in good temper for an hour and a quarter, proceeding leisurely,

allowing a decent interval between the takes, and making never a false cast. Then the trout-basket was full to the cover, and the burden heavy to bear.

It was at last necessary to wade ashore, deposit the chub and begin again. So, for form's sake, catching one more—a good two-pounder, and the largest of the set—and taking him as he lay in the landing-net to the bank, I heaped up the victims, and returned to experience, as in truth I feared, that the fun was at an end. Either I had depopulated the haunt, or had frightened the remnant into a deep, unapproachable hole, fifty yards below. The chub, ranging between three-quarters of a pound and two pounds, looked handsome enough lying on a bed of daffodils in the meadow, but being out of condition, they speedily lost their firmness and colour. The most singular feature of this unlooked-for amusement was its ending. A farmer—a farmer, be it remembered, living in a district where trout were abundant—begged for a brace of chub, on the plea that he had not enjoyed the luxury of a fish dinner for a weary while; and as a man who can eat chub ought to be encouraged, I relieved my conscience by warning him that they were scarcely in the primest order for the table and bade him accept the lot. This he did, rejoicing and thankful, and in the afternoon, at a clean little inn higher up, I heard that he had been magnifying my good qualities, and presenting the smaller fish to his neighbours with open-handed liberality.

On this day my undergraduate friend had with me chartered a dog-cart, and tried lower down the river with the phantom minnow, but with indifferent success. But he had been run after by several pike, and on our way we had seen one of the most entrancing of valleys in a land where the valley scenery is second to none in the British Empire. Scotland and Ireland give mountain and river scenery

grander and oftener, but Wales surpasses both in its valleys. The valley of to-day was never more than a couple of miles wide, but it wound charmingly between the mountains, was level and green, and dotted here and there with cottages overhung with trees, where surely nought but peace ever reigned ; and it stretched westward until it became narrowed by distance into a faint dreamy passage through the misty hills.

The young gentleman who had sought his fortune nearer the coast kindly redeemed his promise of informing me, when our excursions were over, how he and his friend had fared. I had asked him to do so out of curiosity to know how far the paragraph which had brought us both out of London into Wales, had justified his faith. For myself I was quite content, but this is his report, which I take leave to re-report as a pendant to my own experiences of the faith of a paragraph :—

“ In our three days we got seventy-five trout—that is, we took home seventy-five, some we returned—to three rods, but my young friend did not contribute very largely to our bag. Artag is a very pretty place, and commands a fine view of the sea, Barmouth and the hills. There is plenty of fishing to be had in streams, &c., near the place, but we only fished in two lakes, the right of fishing in which belongs to the landlord of our hotel. They are fished by means of boats, which are rowed up to the windward side of the lakes and allowed to drift slowly to leeward. The fish we caught were small, but very game ; nothing above half a pound, but they told me the bigger fish had not yet risen to the surface. Like yourself, we experienced very indifferent weather.”

A badger is not perhaps the kind of fry the reader would look for in a chapter on Spring Trout Fishing, but the writer on angling is always permitted a large amount of

licence in the matter of gossip ; and as I have a badger on hand, perhaps I may have the privilege of dragging him into these pages head and shoulders. The landlord of our hotel, one very cold morning, correctly prophesied that the fish would not rise, and had invited us, as the next best thing to do, to accompany him and assist in unearthing a badger. If I had little hope of killing trout, I was absolutely incredulous as to the badger. But at night we were taken to the malthouse, and there, in the bottom of a big dry barrel, lay, very out of heart and even sullen, one of the finest badgers I had ever seen, with a pretty baby badger nestling against her, in a state of high bewilderment. The unearthing had been effected after four hours of desperate work with pick and shovel.

## CHAPTER II.

## A MARCH OUTING.

THIS was a dream indeed, and worthy of encouragement, by that wooing of slumber which the half-conscious sleeper is able sometimes to accomplish. Here was no revolution of the phantom wheel to which the jaded head is familiar ; no repetition of the worry and work of wakeful life. It was a dream in which the regular, soothing drone of a plashing water-wheel, and a chorus of birds mingled, as if the undertone were afar off. And there was a glamour of bright skies above and sweet-savoured spring growth upon the earth, a rippling stream, and the clear soprano of trilling larks up in the ether. Yet, as I soon realized, the substratum was not a dream at all, for, waking broadly by-and-by, the unfamiliar furniture of the cosy chamber reminded me that I was verily out of town. Over the foot-rail of the bedstead the fishing-suit hung so that my first gaze should strike the dearly-loved keynote for the day. Ah, yes ! It was all clear now. I was domiciled in the miller's house, and the twittering was after all no dream, but real birds in the shrubbery. And the mill-wheel was equally real. It drummed on musically as I dressed ; and a captive linnet downstairs, disgusted perhaps at the feeble tootling of the impertinent but free sparrows in the garden, lifted up its voice and performed splendidly upon its flageolet, with much phrasing and not a little staccato. My kind host,

H., here knocked thrice upon the door-panels, and said or sung, "Wake, O sleeper! we shall have a rise of fly to-day." And then the mill-wheel and the song-birds appeared to my fancy right joyously to take up the refrain, "Yes, a rise, a rise; a rise of fly to-day."

But there was not a rise of fly that day at all worthy of this prelude. We told ourselves jauntily that it did not matter; that this lovely Hampshire country was better than town with its rumours of wars, special editions, and boat-race excitement. Spite of make-believe, nevertheless, we were a trifle silent for a while, for we were human. We wandered up the water, marked the trout, watched twenty or thirty brace of large grayling in the interesting act of spawning upon a shallow, and held converse by-and-by with gallant "South-West," who came down, and with the genial author of "the little Marryat," who came up, and so got through the time all too quickly.

Towards the end of March there is not on the face of nature a great difference between spring and winter. But there is some, especially if you look close. The birds are busy and about, the multitudinous rooks in the manifold elms all alive. The sedges are sere, the rushes yellow, and the grass, except in the water-meadows, still wears its suit of homespun grey. Yet here and there, a clump of king-cups, or a patch of primroses, or a sprinkling of celandines, indicate what is at hand, not to mention catkins, buds, and the warm colour rising to the ends of the branches. Besides, the bare fact that we are wetting the first line upon a famous club water upon which no unsportsmanlike deed is even winked at, is assurance ample that we are in the vernal equinox.

For all that, the sport possible is next to nothing. The trout, abundant and in fair condition, as we can see, are lying as if glued to the hollows in the gravel, and duns are

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hatching apparently at the rate of one per hour. There is no encouragement for the fish to bestir themselves, nor do they. In the afternoon we catch some grayling to return to the water, and undersized trout to grow bigger. The sole contents of the bag at night is a true Test trout of 1 lb. 10 oz., which took that capital fly, a hare's ear with gold twist. Next day there was a better rise of fly for an hour or so, and we could, from a railway-bridge, watch two or three heavy trout pursuing the ascending insects, and gulping them down under water. Every fish was roaming thus. Appearing here now, in a moment they would be snapping at food a yard off, across, down, and back again, with the tail of a sharp stream in the centre as the base of operations, ever swiftly on the move, and vigorous to a degree. Fly-fishing at such times is hopeless, unless you use a bait that passes for larvæ, sunk a few inches. The fish that did at long intervals rise half-heartedly were arrant wanderers, and not to be deluded with floating artificial of any hue or pattern.

Discussions on flies and fly-tying somehow, under these circumstances, arose between whiles with unfailing regularity. H. might pause at the sheep-bridge, and recall merry times with the grayling on the broad water there; M. might, at North Head, go back to his travels and squattering on the Morrumbidgee; C., at the stile, might modestly tell the story of the Indian Mutiny and his experiences thereof. But all roads led to Rome. Before long we would certainly find our way again to dry flies, how to tie them, how to use them. Amongst the quartette were at least two who are foremost amongst the modern masters who have made dry-fly fishing a science, and, as everybody knows, they are its apostles. H. and M. had enough samples about them—the latter had merely come to the river-side for a stroll and chat—to last them as stock two

ordinary lifetimes, yet they were full of plans for new patterns, though those they had already produced were marvellous imitations of the duns we fished out of the water for examination. They still sigh for more worlds to conquer. This, at any rate, must be conceded: the business can only be done by closely copying the water-insects at every opportunity, for the hues of the same species vary wonderfully with the days, and even hours. During the afternoon I caught examples of an olive dun as dark as iron-blue, and as pale as the lightest feather from a young starling.

When the matter becomes one of study of this description, the angler in other parts of the country where the older-fashioned methods prevail can in somewise understand the fascination of dry-fly fishing, and how sincere its devotees are when they declare that they find their highest compensation in attempting none but rising fish. To settle down to a highly-educated trout fairly rising, in a clear chalk stream like Itchen or Test; to cover it repeatedly without putting it down; to drop the fly, correctly floating, just so far beyond its nose as the case requires; and to persevere until the right fly has been found, and the fish killed, is work for first-rate anglers only. When, however, an enthusiast goes on to say that there is no skill in the other ways, my dorsal fin is erect. I do not agree with him for a moment. The methods of fly-fishing are diverse; each has its place. To be skilful with all is the standard at which to aim.

Very cold nights are probably sufficient in the early spring months to account for the poverty of natural fly. The days to which I have made brief reference were brilliantly cloudless, and while the sun was out they were warm and balmy. We could lie upon the ground and smoke our pipes without harm. But chill air strongly asserted itself as eventide approached, and the nights set in bitterly cold. It has been for many springs the same, as many an angler may re-

member. I care not what your days may be ; if the nights are cold the fly will remain backward, and dry-fly fishers may resign themselves to a minimum of sport, and a corresponding maximum of philosophical comfort. Yet they get their outing, which is a good deal. When it is an outing with kindred spirits, and at a place where all things are conducted decently and in order, it must be admitted there ought to be a very pleasant blunting of disappointment's sharp edge. The English angler has so many adverse conditions to contend against in the over-fished waters of his country, that he had better sell his tackle and take to some other form of amusement, if he be unable to lay hold and make the most of the miscellaneous compensations which he may always find if his spirit be rightly attuned. They will not, it is true, fill his basket, but they keep the wheels of his temper oiled, and the fire within from sputtering into the ashes of discontent.

## CHAPTER III.

## AN ODD DAY'S FISHING.

THE odd day out in fishing, in the sense of occasional, is seldom satisfactory in a climate so variable as ours. In accounting, after sport, for a poorly-furnished basket, a lame excuse is better than none, and the embarrassment of riches in the matter of excuses is one of the things which no honest angler can deny. We are jeered at for pleading adverse winds, absence of fly, and too much or too little of water, but these are primary laws upon which the sport of fishing really depends to a degree which only the initiated can understand. The angler who can spare the time to meet them fairly, and abide his opportunity of counteracting evil influences, has, however, some chance of getting the better of them ; to-morrow, if not to-day ; and if not then, next week, or the week after that. The man whose days are snatched one at a time, and not taken at choice even then, has everything against him in the majority of instances. But, in thus prefacing a description of what I have chosen for an odd day's fishing, with a half-plea for consideration in advance, I am reminded that the word "odd" may be also taken to mean something curious ; and it so happens that I can adopt both interpretations. The day to which I am referring was a solitary outing, and it produced odd results.

Pike-fishing was the sport in view, and the river a certain

clear stream somewhere between Land's End and the North Foreland. The month was February. As to the weather, there was nothing to complain of. In winter pike-fishing I never take much heed of wind or rain, having had as good sport with northerly and easterly storms as with southerly and westerly zephyrs. Wind of some kind is necessary, however, and water not discoloured too much. The river was much too low, as I perceived on proceeding to its banks, and the by-stream, where I reckoned upon finding good fish after the flood which had roared down a week previously, had, as I was soon informed, been fished a day or two before, with ominous success. I knew the water well, and was sure that, if the fish had been in biting humour on the day specified, there could not be many left, as no more would head up till after the next flood.

We, as a matter of fact, drew that tributary blank, and passed on to the main river, fishing for an hour without a sign of pike. As they would clearly have nothing to say to the lively dace on single-gut paternoster, I resolved to waste no more precious baits upon them, but put up an artificial spinner that friend Targett, of Salisbury, was good enough, as I sat in his studio one evening, to paint in very artistic semblance of a trout. Even this did not seem to answer at first. Spun rapidly or slowly, high or low, it was all the same. Once I fancied a shadow followed it, but there was no substance.

Here at last came a lovely bend, with deep water under the near bank, and a shallow thirty yards across, overhung with a great weeping-willow. Upon that shallow something bulged, and away went the mimic trout to reconnoitre. A fish came out from under the branches, furrowing the stream on the shelf, and in mid-water I felt that strong smack at the bait which I had eagerly hoped for. In a moment I knew the fish racing down stream was not a pike;

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but my companion, toiling perseveringly up by the rushy length above, looked the incredulity he did not utter when I shouted that I was fast in a salmon. A pike of any size hooked only in the mouth gives you a decent run for his money very often, but it is a run peculiar to itself, and is rarely a dash straight from the strike. He will either pause an instant, leaving you in doubt whether you have not hit a root or pile, or will shake his head savagely just for a moment before he goes away at rapidly-increasing speed. A salmon or trout does not stand at all on the order of his going, but goes at once, like a flash.

This was how my fish behaved, and he furthermore wished to play me a mean trick with a very ugly row of stakes that at some period had protected the bank about sixty yards below. The winter floods of many years, however, had scooped out the bend, and left the strong posts far out in the stream. My fish evidently knew all about them, and I had to give him the butt. Fortunately, everything held, and the danger was averted. Fully ten minutes passed before I could get the fish sufficiently from the depths to confirm my impression as to his family. He kept me most agreeably on the move, rushing hither and thither, and trying every known wile, save leaping out of the water. With a triangle, and perhaps two, in his mouth, that was not likely to happen. By-and-by I raised him, and there was no doubt about the long, blue-grey back. Had the gaff been permissible, the struggle might have been ended presently, but since all I should get of that salmon would be the sport, and as I was, besides, anxious not to harm him seriously, I gave him plenty of time, and allowed him to succumb of his own accord. My companion eventually tailed out the fish, which proved to be a salmon of about ten pounds, a partially-mended kelt, that was prodigiously gaunt. He had taken a pair of triangles, and still had the

indiarubber trout across his jaws. We were able to return him to the water not much the worse for his violent exercise ; and he flourished his tail in farewell, and sped down and away with vigour.

Having thus aimed at the pigeon and found the crow, I put on a live bait, hoping for pike ; and after a while got a three-pounder or so on the single hook of the paternoster. Still, this tackle did not seem to tell, as it often does, in a clear river with deep places close to the bank, and for it I substituted a Jardine snap, with a good eight-inch Thames dace. All too serenely the float sailed down mid-stream, till straightway it disappeared. This was another good fish as to weight, and its play revealed another kelt, fighting bravely to escape from the hooks. With a twisted gut trace, and the substantial hooks on the gimp, all that one had to do was to be patient, but there was no opportunity of landing the fish for the best part of fifteen minutes. This kelt was not very foul, though the vent and thinness were pronounced enough, and it was restored to liberty comparatively sound in wind and limb. At any rate it vanished with a will the moment it was placed in the water.

The sport was very exhilarating for a cold winter day ; still, under the circumstances, a brace of salmon in an hour was a fair allowance, and I wanted no more. Just, therefore, to give the pike an innings, I rigged up a dace upon an ordinary flight, and spun the river from the top of the next meadow. At about the second cast the bait was followed home close to the bank by a salmon of at least 15 lb. I was spinning slowly, about eighteen inches below the surface, and could follow his every moment for the three yards which he travelled. At first he was head and head with the bait ; then he dropped a couple of inches to the rear, and once he seemed to snap at it. Finally catching sight of the angler, he, shade-like, retired in good order. Had

those fish been in season, how consoling this substitute would have been to the balked pike-fisher! I was annoyed at these voracious kelts for their impertinence, though I must confess that as they afforded prime sport for the time being, I had no moral right to abuse them. To that extent I was grateful, yet it was pike I wanted, and not a pack of mere bait-spoilers.

Five minutes later I hooked a blue-black again—a small salmon of about 5 lb. that got off after showing himself floundering on the top of the water. Half a dozen yards lower down I replaced the mangled dace for another that was almost too large for spinning. Yet before many minutes it was taken savagely by an unclean salmon of precisely similar pattern to the two already landed and restored. We got him out safely, but the difficulty we experienced in extracting the hooks rather alarmed me for the consequences. He had taken the whole consignment at a gulp, and was ridiculously restive under the operation that would offer him life and liberty. Placed tenderly in the river, he lay on his side, and appeared to be in a sad state. By means of a stake from the adjoining hedge I kept him back uppermost in the right position, with the near side resting against the flags. The gills were opening regularly, and that was some comfort. After a few minutes of this treatment I took away the prop, and was delighted to see that, though the fish did not move, it kept its upright position. So it remained for a minute; then, at a modest prod from the stake, it awoke to action, lashed its tail, and darted into the middle with surprising promptitude.

This was quite a series of disappointments, as I remarked to my friend; he, as I thought, just a trifle sarcastically, suggested that I evidently bore them with fortitude, as near Spartan-like as the real thing. Probably it was even so. Furthermore, as I returned, with a well-assumed air of

regret at so much wasted time, to my pike-fishing, which had so far ended in nothing but out-of-season salmon, I reflected that it would be well if all the disappointments of life brought with them so pleasant a balance to our credit.

And now came another surprise. There was a deep, long reach which my friend and I had fished carefully with live, artificial, and natural spinning baits, without a vestige of luck. My friend had just spun it up, and, as I had a live bait on Jardine tackle in the water, and was following it down stream, I hoisted my rod over his head and passed him. The float here went down in slanting haste, and this time I knew that at last a pike had appreciated the bait brought so many miles for his notice. The sport was tame after the brisk business with the kelts, but the fish—a handsome female of  $9\frac{1}{2}$  lb.—was none the less welcome.

The short day was waning now, and, as a last attempt, my friend left me near a hatch-hole, to try a by-stream in the next field. Rather than stand idle in the cold I put up the painted trout again, and spun the eddies in the pool, where pike often lie. A brilliant charge was made at the bait, and a large trout sprang high out of water. He was too firmly held to obtain freedom, and was hauled out bodily in the absence of net or gaff. When my friend rejoined me we both agreed that this was a fitting end to an odd day's fishing.

## CHAPTER IV.

## A SNOWY DAY ON THE TAMAR.

AT Bath we suddenly missed the sunshine. It could not be that the weather, which had been so long at set fair, should select this particular day to change? The phenomenally fine spring had been prominently commented upon in all the papers, and every day there was a new paragraph chronicling the arrival of some bird or flower, or butterfly, that had mistaken March for April. Now that I had set forth on a journey of 240 miles, for a bit of trout-fishing, surely the elements were not so cruelly to turn against me!

Yet it was so. There could be no mistaking the woolly-looking clouds rolling down from the north-west over the ancient city of Bladud, nor the general overcasting of the sky. A clergyman in the train said it would be a good thing for the country if we had rain, and, remembering my inveterate luck in such matters, I grimly assured him that the mere fact of my starting on a fishing expedition would be enough to open the sluices aloft, and send the wind into an unfriendly quarter. We saw the sun set over the Bristol Channel, somewhere abreast of Burnham, and it was the most gorgeous spectacle I had ever seen in this country. A finer I could not remember, even under the Southern heavens, or in tropical latitudes. Picturesque layers of lake, saffron, orange, primrose, amber, green, blue, and violet, stretched horizontally across the sky, and, between

the fantastic clouds, changing colour and form every minute, were tints of indescribable delicacy. Flushes of gold and flakes of silver seemed to follow each other, and, after the sun had gone down, they formed along the horizon a lurid background with a slaty bank of clouds, edged with glowing copper, spreading slowly upwards.

In the night I could hear the decided sharp shooting of hail upon the window-panes, and the rude howling of the blast. The morning sky was blood-red. Even after I had booked for Tavistock, I half determined to forfeit my ticket, stay at home, and not go through the farce of travelling to the waterside. But between the storms there were glints of watery sunshine, and the wind, after all, was north-west. Had it been north or east I would not have ventured. The Devonshire anglers have great faith in the early spring fishing, yet on this morning not a representative appeared in the train. Marsh Mills is one of their favourite stations, and Bickley is another. But the infant Plym to-day tumbled down from its moorland birthplace untroubled by footstep of angler. It was, in a word, a bad look-out, figuratively speaking. Literally speaking, the look-out is always a striking one along this valley. Desolate and defiant in winter, smiling and tractable in spring, and altogether lovely in summer, this is one of South Devon's best-known tourist routes, leading, as it does, to big Dartmoor, looming high away to the north-east. The hills were at intervals hidden by the passing storms, swiftly sweeping to sea, but, between whiles, they stood

“Dressed in living green.”

It had hailed and snowed a dozen times by the time I had reached quiet and pleasant Tavistock. While the light waggonette was being got out, I paid a visit to the tacklemaker's, and selected three sets of flies—a large

March brown, with a long tail, a blue upright with silver twist, and a brown palmer, with bushy black body laced round with gold. The Tamar is one of the major rivers of Devon, and the favourite flies are considerably larger than those used on the countless lesser streams and brooks. In another hailstorm off we drove in the teeth of the wind, which, as we mounted up on to the hill country, became painfully biting. In these higher latitudes the hedgegrowths were backward. The gorse was in full bloom, but only here and there a primrose appeared amongst the half-opened buds. The old trees were grey with lichen, or green with ivy, and along the hedges clumps of last year's brown beech-leaves rattled dismally. It was a welcome change when we began to descend into the valley of the Tamar, and be confronted by the Cornish mines on the other side. The landlord of the hotel, the driver of the light four-wheel, the tacklemaker, and now the gentleman to whom I had introductions, were unanimous in warning me that my chances were *nil*.

Nevertheless, the attempt had to be made ; albeit I shivered as I got together my rod, and donned stockings, socks, and brogues, sitting the while near a clump of what seemed to be lilies of the valley, (but which I soon found to be the broad-leaved garlic) watched by a flock of ragged ewes and sportive lambs, under the lee of the hedge, far from the turnips upon which they had been feeding. Strange, but true, the only warm place that day seemed to be in the water, for while the face was iced, and the finger-ends blue and numb, the immersed feet and knees were positively warm. Having waded out to the edge of a stream, I had to wait until a roaring blast permitted me to manage my cast, and ultimately to retreat to my garlic bower, in the shelter of an alder bush, out of the hail. In the succeeding lull, however, I got my chance, and at the first short cast —

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the experimental and careless throw with which every angler, I suspect, commences operations—I saw a small trout turn at the March brown. Fortunately the gale was goodnatured enough to blow straight up the reach of the river from my chosen standpoint. This was not an unmixed advantage, since the best water lay towards the middle, just beyond the scope of my powers, and the stream ahead was running swiftly.

Still, I basketed a brace of small fish of the not uncommon Devonshire size, and had the amusement of observing a trout rise at a snowflake. There was no possible mistake about it. The flake was descending slantingly and leisurely, and when it was within a sixteenth of an inch of the surface, Master Trout popped his snout up and shattered it. Twice during the day I saw this action repeated, and on the second occasion there were plenty of nice little brown flies scudding along the water, without a movement of the fish towards them. If the vision of fish resemble ours, a falling snowflake will, of course, be to them, looking upwards, a dark object, and may present itself to them as a luscious-bodied insect, to be grabbed if possible. Nor am I aware that there is anything novel in trout rising during snow and hail, provided there be no snowbroth in the water. In Lake Ogwen, North Wales, many years ago, I remembered, the fish rose madly during such a storm, and not one was taken before it came or after it ceased. At the same time, as our usual associations of trout-fishing are with balmy summer, hawking swallows, and resplendent dragon-flies, there undoubtedly is something comic in the notion of fly-fishing in a snow-storm.

By-and-by a welcome lull came, and I waded out to a dark-brown reef of rock, round which the water swirled, and from which I could cover a dozen eligible streams, here roughly rippling, there regularly flowing, and anon softly

gliding. While the sun was out the fish rose short, but on the instant the clouds obscured it, they became businesslike. The March brown did all the work, however, save in the case of two silvery smolts, that seemed to be quite ready to go down to sea, and that were returned with no more damage than the rubbing off of a few of their almost impalpable scales. These were tempted by the silver twist of the second fly.

During the first hour the larger trout were resting in fishy meditation, March-brown free. The small fellows—"eight-inchers" if a name may be coined—seemed to be aware of this, and I had to return several, though the Devonshire anglers are in the habit of taking them from most of the streams much below that size. On Dartmoor, for example, I have seen a dish of trout, not one of which was six inches long, and have learned from experience that the more diminutive they run, the more delicious they are, fried with egg and bread-crumb, and served up on artistically-scolloped paper. But at last a timely turn of the wrist revealed something better. I saw him go down like a curved bar of refined gold, and he leaped thrice out of the water, brilliantly beautiful, and bold as a lion. Not more than half a pound was he, but for all that a good trout even for the Tamar, and more gamesome than many treble his size. For some time all the fish were on this pattern, running as like as peas in weight, and every one of them in the pink of condition. In administering to one of them my customary *coup-de-grâce* with a short stick, carried for the purpose, the blow caused him to shoot out a freshly-gorged stone-loach of two inches in length. Had I been a little sooner, I verily believe I might have been able to rank that humble member of the carp family with the prophet Jonah himself, who lodged in the stomach of a fish and yet came forth alive.

After taking half a dozen of these handsome trout,

the next contingent were quite as uniformly a size smaller.

I tried the river higher up and lower down, but was always glad to return to my friendly reef of rocks, and fish over the same ground again. It was eleven o'clock when I first waded in, and at half-past two the sky had grown very dark, and a new gale, with a fresh supply of snow, seemed to have made an end of all sunshine for the rest of the afternoon. Wherefore I gave up, and floundered ashore to find that, snow or not, I had, considering the turbulence of the wind, after all had a very successful time of it on the Tamar on that March day. Lighting a carefully-filled pipe, so that I might gloat becomingly on the sight, near the before-mentioned bed of spring flowers did I outpour the spoil, making them eight brace and a half by the generally received rules of computation. Yet I was not happy. Nothing but an even nine brace would serve my turn, and so back again for that, too often, most tiresome thing, "one fish more."

That fish I soon caught by a fluke; for being utterly unable to keep my cast upon the water, I winched in, the flies dabbling at their will, and close at hand a fierce fish seized the fly, and accommodatingly hooked himself, before I was exactly aware of my good fortune. This made up the full tale of a dozen and half, just turning the scales at five pounds and a quarter. In the return train I encountered a local angler, who had been trying a Dartmoor stream, and he had in his basket a score of trout, that could not, all told, have weighed two pounds. Some of them were like the smaller fish I had returned, rather dingy-coloured. And I noticed that during the day, the brawny shoulders of lonely Dartmoor had been draped in a robe of pure white.

So far as I am aware, there is little, if any, open fishing on the Tamar. The river during the greater part of its

course, of some sixty miles, divides Devon from Cornwall, rising on the moors not far from the sea in the north-eastern corner of the former county, and not far from the source of the Torridge. Both are good trout-streams, but while the Tamar takes a dignified south-westerly direction to Plymouth Sound, the Torridge, after pretending to follow suit, doubles round and makes for Bideford on the northern shore of the county. Fortunately for the angler, the Tamar, except at one or two points, is not tapped by the railway; and to the few miles of cross-country between it and the line below Launceston, it owes more immunity from over-fishing than many of the Devon streams. Some of the landowners will generally give a day's fishing to gentlemen making proper application; but it is a good thing for the water, perhaps, that permission is not indiscriminately granted. Since the Tavy, which runs through Tavistock, has been so well cared for by the local association, the troutng has much improved, and the peal-fishing, late in the season, is sometimes remarkably good.

## CHAPTER V.

## LAST AND FIRST.

ON Tuesday the wind, which had been for some days sticking, with wintry persistency, in the north, bringing occasional snowstorms and white frosts, relented, and gracefully retreated somewhere between west and south. On Wednesday it moved up again. This was the last day of the season for the fish which we have agreed to call coarse, and very much did I wish to have one more day upon the river. There had not been enough snow to spoil the water with broth, nor enough west wind to thaw either it or the thin ice which fringed the ditches; and it was known far and wide that the river had not been in such splendid order since last summer. You will perceive that, on this particular 14th day of March, there must have been plenty of anglers who came to the conclusion that, on the whole, the outlook was sufficiently good to warrant them in trying their last chance.

What a lovely morning it was, too, spite of the pinch of north in the air! I shall not pretend that there was much that could be called spring-like in the landscape. If in the middle of March you keep your eyes open, look closely about you in hedgerow and field, you will no doubt find a few flowers, and an abundance of less apparent evidence that nature is, so to speak, lying in wait for a leap. But the general aspect of the meadows down by the river-side

was precisely what you ought to expect after a winter—a long winter of perpetual floods. The fields were grey, and at their worst, as they always are just before the vernal outburst. Passing through the plantation on our way to the stream, my host pointed with pride to the clumps of daffodils, primroses, snowdrops, and so forth, which have, self-sown, grown on either side of the walk, as long as the oldest man on the place can remember. And at this time of the month you can never, in the neighbourhood of a rookery, mistake the season. Listen to the rooks, year by year, and you will soon detect the peculiar restless vivacity which comes over them between Shrovetide and Easter.

The hedges were leafing, and the elder-bushes and honeysuckles were especially forward. I mention these things, knowing right well that they have nothing to do with fishing, and knowing that some cynics pretend to ridicule us for always dragging in our sentimental gush, as they term it, about birds, flowers, and scenery. The fact is, on the last day of the season we look for these signs and tokens, just as in June, by-and-by, we shall expect to stroll down to the opening day amidst a blaze of flowers, and with swallows and dragon-flies hawking around all day long.

The river smiled with a clear countenance that morning. Perhaps I have no right to call it the river now, for the course as laid down in maps two hundred years old is altered, and a new channel has been cut across yonder, and the half-mile or so upon which I went to operate has, without any room for dispute, become the private right of the ubiquitous, but in this instance open-hearted, riparian owner. Else, probably, I should have allowed the 14th of March to pass unheeded, for I am not an enthusiastic Thames man, and there is no nearer river. The stationary punt, and the monotonous travelling of the float, peculiar

to the one kind of angling, and the ill-luck that has always attended my spinning performances in another kind, I have never yet learned to love. But now it was different “Private water” covers a multitude of sins. The under-gardener, who was, here, a sort of water-bailiff, had reported two huge pike that had been seen since the subsidence of the flood, and there were others who could testify to a better supply than usual of ordinary fish.

The forenoon became just a shade cloudy, and the water was nicely rippled. Our baits were of the best. We fished fine and perseveringly, trying every method, yet giving each a fair trial. My comrade was not only no angler, but boasted of his ignorance and inexperience. His tastes lay in all sports in which horses and dogs are concerned, and in them only. The under-gardener, Phil, looked after him, therefore, as to the management of his baits and tackle.

At about eleven o'clock he put his rod down on the turf, and strolled up to where I was spinning, filling and lighting his pipe as he came. I could see that he was tired of the game. He said as much. He confessed he had had enough of it. I ought perhaps to state that we had, at the outset, tried with exceeding care all the portions of the water likely to hold the reported large fish, and had bestowed as much attention as any prudent angler should upon the bend where Phil had on three separate occasions seen pike on the feed. My friend's bait was now working in a rather rapid length between two bends, and the water was shallow. I pointed out, therefore, that he might well be disappointed if he was not more wide-awake—more cognizant of the fitness of things. He did not care, he said ; one place was as good as another. Besides, as the bait must be dead by this time, he had merely thrown it in that it might be out of the way. This was, no doubt, precisely what he had done, for, upon looking down to his rod, I saw that the

stream had taken his float quite into the side, where it hung fire against a rush.

I gradually worked down to the spot, and spun all the water, noticing, as I passed my friend's gear, that the bait was defunct, and lying on the outside of a few dead sedges. It had not a kick left in it. And I passed on. About ten yards below I managed to achieve a kink and a foul in one of the rings. While getting the knots out I heard a steady and peculiar long-drawn swish behind me. Instinct must have told me what it was. Before I could look round the noise had ceased. It had scarcely been more pronounced than the rustle of a silk dress, and indeed the sound very much resembled that homely token. Yes, sir; that steady rustle behind me had been caused by the movement of my friend's line through the brown, brittle sedges, and the movement had been caused by the run of a pike. Yet, as I perceived, on taking a leisurely observation, the float remained on the top, and moved not. But it had been drawn a couple of yards nearer me, and the line which, when I passed, was freely coiled on the grass, was now taut.

The owner of this float was now rambling off towards the distant plantation, but he got a glimpse of me, and I beckoned him back to his duty. He sauntered in response across the meadow, all undeserving of such luck. I moved quietly up, keeping back, and stooping low, and so saw the process of gorging at ease, and not without envy. For it was a goodly fish—thick-shouldered, as long apparently as your arm, and of a dark-brown colour, as the light caught him. As he lay about three inches below the surface, he was evidently from eye to tail all that was desired in a specimen pike. So it must be, hard though it was, that he had not responded to my scientific fishing, but had rather come of his own accord to the mangled, stranded, dead

bait of an angler who had simply abandoned the entire business.

The dace was cross-wise in the pike's mouth, and from the hard pointed snout there exuded a silver cloud of tiny scales, stripped from the bait. Suddenly this latter was ejected with violence, perhaps four inches, up stream, but before I could realize quite how it was done, there was a dark flash below, which instantaneously obscured the bright little dace, then a reflected swirl on the top of the water, and next a line cutting obliquely on the surface down stream as the fish raced away. It seemed as if the pike had shot out the bait for the wanton pleasure of dashing at it and catching it on the hop. Till then he had been playing with it, probably ; or rather tickling his palate by sampling the flavour of the dainty morsel. Then he must have fiercely resolved to be tantalized no more, and therewith the dash and swirl. I am certain that the pike at that strange rush took the bait, hook and all, down at one fell gulp, and might have been struck without a moment's further law.

My friend came up while the winch was still growling and revolving, and nonchalantly begged me to oblige him, if I would be so kind, by taking up the rod and dealing, as might be necessary, with the fish. I *was* kind enough to oblige him, and the fish was 14 lbs., and heavy with spawn. The same kind of luck—for my friend—was repeated twice, but with much smaller fish, before luncheon. On each occasion his bait, left to itself, caught the pike, and I was allowed the privilege of landing them. For myself, that last day of jack-fishing brought me, off my own rod, nothing whatever.

At luncheon, in a little rustic house, of thatch and varnished oak, in the plantation, our host, the lethargic angler, and myself, discussed a very curious question. In

piscatorial law whose property were those three pike? Did they belong to the owner of the tackle upon which they were caught without the slightest assistance on his part, or to me who happened to land them? That was the question, because, after all, it must be remembered, that in each case the fish hooked itself with the customary live gorge. Could they be called partnership assets?

“Make it your first, as well as last,” the Squire said, at length.

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“It will be light until half-past six to-night, and we might do it,” he replied.

“Do what?” I demanded.

“Oh! I beg your pardon. I forget to tell you that I rent Four Beeches, at Birley’s farm, and that we might go and reconnoitre, and make this 14th of March the first day of trout as well as last day of jack-fishing.”

This, then, was the explanation. Birley’s farm was exactly ten miles by road, and the Squire undertook—his browns being fresh and fit, and the roads hard—that by three o’clock we might be whipping the little trout-stream. It is not usual to commence trout-angling here until the first of April, but there was no positive law against the Squire fishing his own water, and he was rather anxious to look at his recently-acquired rental, and be introduced to his fish. In this way we drove to the short lane leading to the gate of the long, narrow water-mead known as Four Beeches. We had but one trout-rod between us, and agreed to toss for first use, and thereafter to fish alternate quarters of hours, until we had taken a brace and half of fish. At that point we were to stop, and as compensation to the trout for interfering with them out of rule, there was to be no further fishing until the middle of April.

The Squire won the toss, and had the first fifteen minutes,

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fishing with an iron-blue dun. I did not agree with him in his policy. The day was too tranquil to my fancy for an iron-blue, though I must admit that the few flies dancing over the water appeared to be of that class. At any rate the Squire did not rise a fish. While he had been casting I had overhauled his book, and rigged up a collar of my own, a March brown as stretcher, and a redspinner as dropper. The Squire is a first-class fly-fisher, and he laughed at my idea. He said I could not support it by any admissible argument, or warrant it by any established theory. So far I agree with him, but I was able to fall back upon a certain day on the Darent, when the practice answered perfectly. My turn came, and I worked on until I had two minutes of my quarter of an hour left.

“All right,” I said, after a while, “two casts more and I have done.”

At the last cast I got a half-pound trout, which I at once returned, on the understanding that it was not to be reckoned as part of the brace and half. The fish was not in bad condition, nor yet in good, but we returned it, determining that then and hereafter twelve inches should be the limit for trout taken. I ought perhaps to state that the fish took the stretcher fly.

The Squire now had another bad quarter of an hour, and my next turn was also a blank. The Squire scored a third duck’s egg, though he had exchanged his dun for a March brown. Sticking to my former cast, I put my best leg forward. Time was flying, and we were not far from the top of Four Beeches. For a couple of hundred yards the water was strongly rippled on the gravelly bed, and I determined to fish across and down, and to work chiefly with the dropper. I knelt reverently by the margin, and acted as per programme, the redspinner bobbing upon the top, and with every bob coming nearer to our bank. At the first

cast, the Squire, who stood considerably below the scene of operations, said that a fish rose. I had not seen it, though I fancied there was a splash. At the second cast I hooked a fish about ten yards down stream, and almost close under the bank upon which we stood, and I noticed that the fly was taken as it descended upon a rough stickle after dangling in the air. Repeating the experiment before my quarter of an hour had expired I had fairly caught the brace and half of trout. The biggest was not far short of two pounds, but he was dirty and lean, and was put back. The others weighed 2 lb. 9 oz. the brace, and were passable as to condition, as we admitted when we cut into them at dinner.

On arriving at home we found that the lazy man had devoted the afternoon to perch-fishing, and had caught a pretty dish of half-pounders. The experiences of that 14th of March—to me both last and first day—were queer. Luck had been unevenly divided. The best men did not win. At the same time that the ill-luck of the morning was mine, the good luck of the afternoon fell to my share.

“Be content,” quoth the Squire, “you, at least, have nothing to grumble at; but you might pity me, whose own fish flout him to his face.”

## CHAPTER VI.

## A LAY SERMON.

THE 14th of March had arrived, and with it the last day of angling on the open waters. Holiday time for the coarse fish honoured by mention in Mundella's Act would begin to-morrow morning, and would last until the midnight of June 15. May they be happy ; may they prosper ; yea, may they multiply and bring forth abundantly, that the heart of the angler may rejoice, and his bag and his creel be filled with good things. There was a frost on the previous night ; not an ice-bearer, as was the stinging white frost of Sunday, but still an unmistakable frost. The sun retired over the woods westward, rosy-faced, and making all the sky blush red for its boldness. The smoke from the village chimneys rose straight and blue into the clear air, leisurely hovering over the place, and dissolving into nothingness, rather than drifting away bodily, as it would have done had it been received by a blustering blast of March. Then the stars came out bright, fearing nothing, and by nine o'clock the stillness of the country, disturbed only by the regular strokes of the church clock, and the distant barking of an uneasy farm-dog, settled over the place.

In the morning, as I walked to the railway-station to see how many anglers had come down to take advantage of their last opportunity, the grass glittered gloriously with frost, and the children were blue with cold.

The closing day of the season was hot as summer, after the sun was fairly up ; and if our angling friends were not altogether satisfied with the result of the day's operations, they cannot deny that a more magnificent March day never came within their experience. I am aware that this would be poor consolation for an empty bag, but it is as well to be now and then reminded that in this world we cannot have everything ; but it was, as one would have supposed, a good day for angling. The wind veered between west and south, the water was in fair medium volume and colour, and the weather appeared to be settled. Against this the brightness of the sun might be urged, but that is an objection, as applied to bottom-fishing, to which I do not, especially at this time of the year, attach much value, though when the fly-rod comes into play, it is an objection that always holds. There were perhaps a score of anglers, arriving by the early train, and they congratulated each other upon the promising look of things, as they went their several ways. For myself, not being violently fond of bottom-fishing, unless the float goes down at every swim, and having discovered on the previous afternoon that the fish were not "on," I elected to ramble through the meadows, and watch how the brethren were faring at their several stations. The sum-total of fish caught must have been very disappointing, and I sincerely hope that the anglers who went in other directions found their last day more productive of sport. There was not enough to make me a respectable piscatory description.

In my saunter through the meadows to a certain mill, I had a thousand-and-one evidences of the forward character of the season. There was an abundance of insects on the water, and the cow-dung fly was in great force. That the lesser celandine and daisy, the anemone in the copses, and, in the meadow trenches, the kingcup, should be bloom-

ing, was not surprising. Under almost any circumstances one begins to look for them in the middle of March. But there were masses of frog-spawn in the ditches, the black speck in the nasty-looking globules already assuming proportions which bespoke an unusually early release of the tadpole ; and many of the aquatic plants were at least three weeks more forward than is their custom. The lapwings, a month ago, were in possession of some marshy fields which they haunt during the winter, but they had now disappeared, and, in their place, were vast flocks of wood-pigeons. The cushat is one of the wild birds that I admire, spite of his bad character amongst the farmers. He has a portly form, and the slaty-blue back, the metallic pinky bronze of the breast, and the white marks of the neck, make up a fine blending of colours, which if not brilliant, are still pleasantly striking. Butterflies were numerous up and down the sunny hedges. The air was choral with blithe lark-music, and here and there with the sweet song of the mavis. That little brown rascal the vole was out and about, and the dabchicks were making the most of the day. I accidentally put up a couple of wild ducks, quacking their alarm as they rose, and I nearly trod upon a lark, sunning herself under a tuft. These observations I take the liberty of mentioning as justification for selecting to saunter instead of fish.

The first patient angler that drew my attention from the many claims there were upon it, was very angry at the minnows, which certainly were provoking. They worried his bait perpetually, and took down his float in the merriest fashion every other swim. He caught four while I watched him, and plump, handsome little fellows they were where-with to tempt perch or trout. The minnows were equally on the rampage with nearly all the anglers I observed that day, and sufficient might have been taken to furnish one of

those minnow tansies, which Walton says make a dainty dish of meat ; “ for,” he observes, ‘ being washed well in salt, and their heads and tails cut off, and their guts taken out, and not washed after, they prove excellent for that use ; that is, being fried with yolks of eggs, the flowers of cowslips and of primroses, and a little tansy.’

Three and four roach each seemed to be the amount of the average “ takes ” up to three o’clock in the open water, and as the sun smote fiercely upon them, and the barges were passing every half-hour, the worthy anglers were not altogether happy. On the whole, our comrades would not be able to reckon their last day of the season as amongst the brilliantly successful.

While the excursionists were travelling homewards in the train, I sat at meat with a friend in the neighbourhood, who was sorely vexed at them ; and in order that his reasons may be inwardly digested by my erring brother of the angle, I venture to transcribe his observations, premising that the text was our Easter holiday ; and the application of the discourse, which, reversing the usual order, shall come by way of introduction, may be thus set down :—Even the humblest angler should consider, when he goes a-fishing, that he ought not to discredit the general body of which he is a member ; ought not to offend, disgust, and defy land-owners and occupiers ; ought never to be guilty of un-sportsmanlike practices, simply because there happen to be no penalties to enforce wholesome regulations.

Herewith follows the preachment which I will call

#### THE LAY SERMON OF CURSITOR RISE.

It is necessary perhaps, brethren, for me to explain that when—signing the transfer which divorced me for ever from the business by long devotion to which I had at last secured a moderate income in four per cents.—I retired to this village, and christened my bit of freehold, in grateful remembrance, by

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the name of Cursitor Rise, I was as fond of a piscatorial outing or country ramble, as town-born, town-bred man could be. As the years rolled round, a little rural trip at Easter and Whitsuntide seemed the proper thing to do. Thus did I foster that love for the country which has registered me, though in a modest way, one of the Home Counties landholders. The sight of the holiday-keepers turning the railway-stations into a scene of confusion, crowding the omnibuses, overloading the steamers, and swarming to the suburbs, gave me lively satisfaction. To see so many people joyous warmed my heart. I blessed them, and wished them God-speed in the woods and meadows, on river, sands, and sea, to which they were bound.

But just now that we, in our later *rôle* of country residents, are suffering from a raid of town excursionists, the general question of holiday outings wears a different aspect. By the short single line which connects us with the main system of railway came, at nine o'clock, perhaps a hundred third-class passengers—men, women, and children—to taste the sweets of the country, no doubt, but also to invade our repose and ignore the sacred claims of property in a really alarming manner.

No boy has a right to thrust his arm through the railings and grab at my lilies of the valley; nor should his father respond to my interruption by contemptuously referring to me as an "old bloke." By what argument, too, can the honest man who followed soon after, justify his two sons in pelting my pet spaniel, placed in the front garden to repel further inroads? Yet these things happened on this joyful holiday morning, as a small contingent of the invaders, bound for a canal a mile or so distant, passed along the high-road, chivying the peaceful fowls right and left into everybody's gardens and yards, irritating the village dogs, and leaving in their wake quite a ground-swell of disturbance.

The great feature of Cursitor Rise is the garden at the rear of the house, with its lovely lawn sloping down to a river, and an aspect that catches the morning sun. Across the river are meadows, beautifully green, and beginning to be gaily decked with flowers. The further bank, for the distance of a quarter of a mile, was many years ago a towing-path, and there has been for a long time a perpetual warfare as to the right of fishing between certain London anglers and the farmer who at present rents the water-meads. There is no necessity for me to enter into the dispute, although during the past season I have been ashamed of the manner in which some Cockney anglers have defiantly fished in waters which are undoubtedly

private. One Sunday, three men used the foulest language to the farmer, and threatened to throw him into the water if he did not leave them. The three men are probably not aware that within half an hour of their departure by the train, the outraged proprietor appeared with a constable on the scene of their exploits. But let that pass. I would like, after all, to make my sermon as agreeable as I can, consistently with plain-speaking.

And now to return to our discourse. On the morning of the holiday to which I am referring, after being ruffled by the epithet "old bloke" and so forth, I forgivingly retired, and took my favourite chair on the lawn, close to the river. Along the old towing-path the other side, four or five anglers were already at work throwing in groundbait and plumbing the depth. The women and children were dispersing to the hedge-rows and over the grass-land, pausing at the ditches, and foraging along the margins of the watercress-beds. There was no great harm in this, though, if the lessee of the land had not happened to be holiday-making on his own account, there must have been something in the shape of a collision between him and the trespassers. The excursionists, I have no doubt, enjoyed themselves in the fresh country air, and unbroken sunshine. The sights and sounds were all calculated to raise the spirits and charm the senses. To people lately arrived from courts and alleys, what with the cattle grazing in deep content, the lambs frisking with the ewe-mothers, the birds in full song, and, pervading all, that gracious odour peculiar to growing grass and leafing hedges (though no perfume of flowers enters into it), every prospect must have pleased.

Shall I add the rest, and say "Only man is vile"? That would be too harsh. Indeed, I would drop the subject altogether, but for the hope that my grumble may act as a warning. Why, then, O brothers of the angle, did you deem it worth your while to send your wordy, and sometimes vulgar chaff across the river to me, the harmless gentleman, perusing his paper on the lawn of Cursitor Rise? You, friend, wearing the straw hat, seemed doubtless to make a telling point by your "He's got 'em on." But what did you mean? Your comrade, the red-haired fisherman with a cold in his head, must needs also indulge in occasional references to what he called my "'at," which, truth to confess, is a respectable article of French manufacture, and only remarkable from its sensible breadth of brim. Judge, then, of my feelings when, at intervals, a strident voice would loudly inquire, "I say, 'ooze yer 'atter?" But I took no apparent notice of these unfriendly efforts at witticism,

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and, receiving no encouragement, you at length forbore to insult the meek individual who had not only given no cause of offence, but who was full of sympathy with you in your temporary escape from London.

My good friends, the excursionists, listen to me in all kindness. After an experience of some dozen holiday raids, I can understand the dislike felt by the countryfolks against the "Cockney excursionist." I grant that it is only a small percentage of your number that brings you into contempt, but always remember that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. The character of the whole flock is generally estimated by the conduct of its few black sheep. So, the thoughtlessness of just a handful of your band at this Easter outing stamps you all as selfish and ill-mannered. What will my neighbour of the water-meads say when, on his return, he finds the stakes torn from the hedge, paper and broken bottles strewed upon the grass, and the ashes of your camp-fire staring him in the face?

The chasing of the four white ducks out of the river and into the meadow I admit afforded the children plenty of fun, but the proprietor of the water-cress bed—along the whole length of which the heavy birds floundered in their anxiety to escape the sods so gleefully hurled at them—will pay for that amusement to the tune of fifteen or eighteen shillings. The damage will not be a farthing less. The water-cress was in its most tender stage, and of the rich brown tint so much admired by connoisseurs. It had been weeded and nurtured into an even, healthy, and extra valuable bed. In a few days it would have been cut and sent to London ; and so superlative was its quality, that it ought to have been purveyed only amongst the nobility and gentry. But those four white ducks, having been driven into it by some of your children, remained there all day, paddling pleasantly to and fro, but trampling down the water-cress beyond redemption.

Then again, there was the removal of the staple from the post. Believe me, that gate was not chained up as a joke. When the staple was hammered in, it was to signify to all comers that there was a special reason for keeping the barrier closed night and day. I am free to confess, my pale-faced friend with the baby in arms, that your wife could not clamber over those five bars, as you and the boys did. She looked much too weakly for that feat, I was sorry to note. But you surely could not be aware that the probable consequence of your battering out the staple with a big stone, would be an irruption of live stock into a meadow from which a particularly excellent crop of hay was expected ? It was nothing, may be, but thoughtless-

ness on your part, though it did occur to me that there was an unnecessary fierceness in your exclamation, "What the doose do they mean by fastening up a gate in this way?" My advice is this:—Come into the country as often as you can, take your reasonable fill of its lawful pleasures; but *do* respect other people's property, rights, and feelings. In a word, on these excursions, simply do to others as you would others did unto you.

On the whole, worthy excursionists, you must have had a long, glorious day in the country. Will you bear with me further, while I correct a few erroneous impressions some of you formed? The blossoms which whiten my kitchen garden, as if a snow-storm had swept the trees, and which afforded so much delight to the anglers opposite, who kept summoning their non-angling friends to look at them, are not, as you supposed, those of the apple-tree. They are cherry, plum, and pear blossoms. The apple-trees will blossom later, with a pink and white bloom to which none else can compare. The flowering sprigs which, spite of prickles, some of the youngsters plucked out of the copse hedge, are not from the may, or hawthorn bush. The hawthorn is in full leaf when it flowers. It is the blackthorn which blossoms before the leaves appear, and they were blackthorn branches which the gatherers seemed so determined to preserve for introduction to their London neighbours as veritable may. There is really no resemblance between the two trees: the hawthorn, or whitethorn, being, if not imposing, still neat and compact; while the blackthorn, or sloe-tree, is a ragged, rambling bush of little account.

I must put your women-folk and children right also as to the so-called buttercups. The glossy yellow flowers of which they gathered so abundant a store by the ditch-sides were the wild marsh marigold, which, as Tennyson truly says—

"Shines like fire in swamps and hollows grey."

There are three other flowers which, from their family likeness, pass as buttercups, and our Easter visitors had a specimen of each. It is early yet for the buttercup *par excellence*, or bulbous crowfoot, which in June will powder your boots with its golden dust, but I fancy I saw one or two precocious specimens. Early also would it be for the greater celandines, or swallow-wort, were it not so forward a season, but they have this year hastened to open their petals as an Easter offering. Next we have the lesser celandine, or pilewort, which may be distinguished from the other by the number of its petals, which vary from eight to twelve, while those of the greater are four

in number. The little shade-loving pilewort was in flower during the first week of February.

If the two damsels carrying the small basket had crossed the plank over the brook, and pushed on to the open pasture beyond the clump of elms in whose tops they saw the busy rookery, they would have found some cowslips. Perhaps, however, it is well that they did not, for there are a few oxslips coming on, and they might have been sacrificed while yet in the bud.

The jolly anglers opposite—to whom, in conclusion, I will call attention—seemed to have had a most indifferent day's sport, as indeed they were almost certain to do in the east wind, bright sun, and clear water. They fell into that very common fault of roach-fishers, and threw in too much groundbait. Nor did they appear to be at all aware that the shadows of their bodies and long bamboo rods were upon the water. I am aware that they could not have faced the sun without coming to my side; but they might have sat farther back. But for their ill-timed merriment over my broadbrim, I would in all kindness have informed them that to my knowledge a brace of jack were lying in the hole. The red-haired man found this out for himself in the afternoon, for, a small roach being hooked, one of the pike, tempted by the manner in which it was played by the fisherman, made a dash, and broke away roach, tackle, and top joint. I forgive the angler for swearing so lustily; most of us might have done so under the circumstances.

One word more. The two fish said by the oldest angler of the three to be dace were nothing of the kind—they were chub, as the black tail-fins might have shown. Had they been dace, they should have been returned to the water, such fish being, from their recent spawning, quite out of condition. The anglers were not overweighted with fish on their homeward journey; but the women and children had great quantities of such spring flowers as had come in their way, and they were all happy, and tired. Finally, brethren—good luck be with you. Ponder my sayings.

## CHAPTER VII.

FIRST OF APRIL.

WHAT struck me more than anything else, standing by the waterside in the somewhat dull morning of the 1st of April with which I am now concerned, was the extreme backwardness of the season. There was not the slightest spring of grass to be seen in the meadows, and you had to examine very closely to find the signs of budding in the trees. The hawthorns were beginning to shoot, no doubt, and the blackthorns, according to their custom, had flowered. But the clump of willows near which I stood arrested my attention, because I remembered that on the 1st of April of the previous year they were fairly towards development of leaf. Even now they had begun to sprout. But the willow shoots in a curious way, and the sprouting leaf at a little distance looks like something which has decayed, rather than like something which is about to burst into life. Flowers also were few and far between. I was treading on some ground ivy, which had fairly blossomed, and in the marshy places and near the river, a few celandines had opened their large yellow stars to catch what there was of sun. But, on the whole, it was a very wintry-looking 1st of April prospect, and, of course, a moment's reflection would convince one, that this was only natural, for the series of floods had been long and vexatious, and, when the water had gone down, there had

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supervised nipping frosts and blighting east winds, which had put a strong check upon the forwardness which early in February was being remarked.

But looking about one to make notes of what there was or what there was not in meadow, wood, marsh, or hedgerow was not angling, and the ten minutes, which I must confess had been spent in the above observations, might probably lose me that fish, of whose existence I was well aware. I knew of his being there during the first week of March. I saw him twice moving about between St. David's Day and Lady Day, and on the previous evening, just before the sun went down, as I stood on the little wooden bridge spanning a turbulent torrent, which constituted a sort of extra byfall a short distance removed from the weir proper, I was delighted to find that my gentleman had not departed for foreign parts.

A very simple-looking man, in that queer combination of nautical and farmyard costume so often to be seen by the river-side, sucked his short black pipe as he leaned upon the rail. He looked so innocent and confiding, and seemed so indifferent to anything connected with the water, gazing as he did at the moment with a far-off style at a distant hill crowned by clumps of trees, that I entered into conversation with him. Yes; he had no doubt there were some trout in the weir pool, and, indeed, he remembered that last year towards the fag end of the season a seven-pounder had been taken between the lasher and weir, and, now he came to think of it, he was also able to state that Tim Bridges, a "stoopid sort o' feller," working on the railway, had not more than two months ago been fined by the magistrates 30s. for taking a trout out of season from the very weir pool which was thundering in our ears. I was glad to hear that Mr. Bridges had suffered for his breach of the law, although, as the man had gone about from village to village showing his

prize, and swiping at each exhibition, it was evident that he was unaware, until too late, of the crime he had wrought. It was a bad case, however, the fish being in miserable condition.

I ought, perhaps, to remark that the weir pool at the spot of which I am writing was a very peculiar one. There was the small byfall to which I have referred; there was the weir proper; there was a broadish lasher, the whole between them making a very fair description of tumbling bay, flanked by strong, individual streams. A little below, however, there were three small islands ranged at almost equal distances along the bed of the river, and as the bed had silted up between these islands, the stream from the byfall ran swiftly, close under the bank, which was hollowed out and steep. It was in one of the swift streams of this by-water, not far from where it roared under the little bridge, that the trout upon which I had fixed my affections was located.

“There’s a pretty good trout feeding yonder,” I said to the rustic, who still smoked on upon the bridge, with the bowl of his pipe in an inverted position.

“No,” he said, “I don’t know much about fishing; but you may depend on’t there’s no trout there.”

“Oh,” I said, “I beg your pardon, you are mistaken. I have seen him there several times myself, and I mean to get him if I can to-morrow morning.”

“Well, sir, I wish yer luck,” he replied. “There’ll be two or three gents a-fishing, I expect, off the ware-beams in the morning. I see ‘em going to the White Bull wi’ their baskets and rods as I come along just now. You had better be early.”

This, I told him, I intended to be, and the civility and intelligence of the man so impressed me that I offered him the choice of any cigar he might fancy from my case. On the morning of April the first I kept the resolution which I

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had informed my rustic companion I had made, and was at the water-side right early. It was very little after daylight, and, although the wind seemed to be backing a little towards the north, and, although it was a cold air, it was nothing like so piercing as it had been during the previous month.

I soon got to work, spinning over the spot where my trout had taken lodgings, but without any success. I worked the stream thoroughly down to the end until breakfast-time, toiling hard and executing every dodge with which I was acquainted. My marked trout would have none of me. Then I winched up my line, and, disposing safely of the flight, strolled across within hail of two London anglers who had been similarly occupied for three hours over the weir pool. One of them said he had been broken away by a big trout ; the other said he had had repeated attacks made upon his bleak ; but neither had anything to show for their operations. So I left them still trying, and cheering themselves with the interchange of an opinion that the sun would soon shine and infuse something of warmth into the chilly atmosphere.

For myself, I walked back to the White Bull, and resolved that if I could get no trout I would at least get breakfast. I was not a little surprised, though very much delighted, to find that when John, the waiter, with a look of triumph, whipped off the cover from the dish, there lay exposed to view a very shapely Thames trout that, in the full enjoyment of its physical proportions, would have weighed over three pounds. I asked no question but attacked the meat, which did not, however, eat with the flavour which betokens the well-conditioned fish. Still, there it was upon the table, as the *pièce de résistance* of the feast, and I did it ample justice.

“Where did you manage to get your trout, John ?” I said, as the waiter came to see how I was getting on.

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"Well, sir, I cannot exactly say where he came from, but I believe as he was caught in the river here this morning."

"Oh, nonsense," I said ; "impossible ! I was out there at daylight myself, and there was not a soul about at that time, although the gentlemen who are stopping here came down to the weir soon after."

"Well, sir, to tell you the truth, I don't know ; but I heard them say that the fish had been caught this morning."

Hereupon, when breakfast was over, I strolled round to the bar and into the smoking-parlour, where, as I expected, I found the landlord. I knew this gentleman of old, and scarcely hoped to receive any information from him ; but I felt bound, as a matter of duty, to put him through the leading questions one asks on such an occasion.

"Well, I really don't know," he said. "The trout, of course, has been caught to-day. I shouldn't think of buying a fish out of season, but I never ask any questions. All I can tell you is that the trout was alive when he was brought here."

"What time did you get it?" I inquired.

"I can answer that question very exactly," he replied with a smile, "for the clock in the old church at Longton-cum-Burton was striking seven as I handed over two shillings and took in return the fish, which was still gasping, his gills opening slowly but unmistakably."

"May I ask from whom you bought it?" I then inquired.

"I bought it," he said, "from Bridges."

"What," I said, "do you mean Bridges, the same man that was fined thirty shillings for taking a trout out of season this side of Christmas?"

"Yes," he said, "that is the man, but he learned a lesson that time."

“Do you think Bridges caught the trout?”

“That I cannot say; as I told you, I never ask questions, because I know that if I did, in cases of that kind, I should generally hear lies in answer to them.”

I did not quite understand the matter, nor did I feel satisfied about this Thames trout; and as I stood in front of the inn, looking up at the waxen buds which tipped all the branches of the great chestnut-tree, and blowing up clouds of tobacco smoke to reach them if they could, I heard the voice of a man who was evidently in some stage of liquor—a voice thick and droning, and the words he spoke, run into each other as they were, at once attracted my attention, for those words were—

“And a blanked good trout it was, I can tell you.”

I knew where the voice came from, and strolled round leisurely through the stable-yard, past the kitchen, and so to the taproom, where I saw a labouring man stretched on a settle, with a small measure, apparently of gin, on the table, and an empty glass by its side. There were two other men sitting on each side of the fire smoking stolidly, and not paying, apparently, much attention to the gentleman on the settle. One of them spoke, remarking in a careless sort of tone,—

“Well, that is two bob off the thirty, anyhow, Jim.”

Here, then, was Mr. Bridges, who had sold the fish; and without beating about the bush, I said, pretending that we were old acquaintances,—

“Hallo, Bridges, how are you? That was a good trout you got this morning.”

“ ‘Scuse me, sir,” he said, “you’ve got the better on me, for I’m blest if I remember you. Howsomever, that’s neither here nor there; but I didn’t catch the trout, you know.”

“Who did, then?”

“A man we calls Swankey hereabouts.”

“A fisherman?”

“Not exactly to say a fisherman—a sort of poacher feller.”

“When did he catch it?”

“I should say it were about three this morning he got that trout, but in the most queerest place you’d think on. What Swankey was particckerly pleased about was that one of them swells that is stopping here put him on to the fish last night. Then, d’ye see, Swankey, who never meant to go fishing this morning, comes and borrows my old rod and goes and gets a bleak, and, by George! he’d not been gone an hour afore he comes back wi’ a bloomin’ trout.”

The reader will naturally observe at once that the person called Swankey was my innocent friend, to whose agreeable manners I had offered the generous tribute of a good cigar on the previous evening, and who had abused my confidence by slinking out in the raw, dark morning, and capturing the fish upon which I had set my desires for a good month past.

I am too much of a philosopher to fly into a rage over a trifle of this kind; but I must confess, as I took up my rod and tackle, and strolled down once more to the river, I felt that Mr. Swankey had got, not only a Thames trout, but a thorough-paced April fool in my humble self.

The two gentlemen who were on the weir-beams when I left for breakfast were there when I returned, and there I left them, when, somewhere towards one o’clock, I took apart my rod, and gave up fishing for the day, preferring to wander along the towing-path and across a famous wood and over certain downs upon which some excellent Roman remains are still to be seen, to fruitless toiling after impossible Thames trout. I heard afterwards that those

gentlemen fished from sunrise to sunset without cessation, and that they returned to town by the last train at night, arriving in their domestic circles a few minutes the right side of midnight, to confess (if they had told all the truth), that they had spent somewhere about twenty-four shillings each, and had caught nothing. I did manage to hook two trout, but it was done with an Alexandra fly, and I saw that they would be better returned to the water ; for to all intents and appearances they would have cut up pretty much as did the larger fish which had been so brutally snatched from me by the innocent-looking rustic.

In a river where nothing but fly-fishing is allowed, I consider the use of the Alexandra fly a distinct evasion, although, perhaps, a colourable one, of the established regulation. The use of this gaudy creation does not, in my opinion, come under the head of legitimate fly-fishing, and I would take care, were I the proprietor of a small trout-stream, that neither it nor the minnow should be ever used there. In rivers, however, like the Thames, where all kinds of methods are employed, and where the trout are not good fly-taking fish, the Alexandra is quite a permissible lure, and I believe that if the so-called flies were made larger than the specimens we usually buy, and persevered with, they would make a very good account, indeed, of the smaller Thames trout.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## A LOVELY JUNE DAY.

THERE seemed to be scarcely any night in that glorious Scottish hill-country, for there was a most beautiful half-light in the eastern sky at two o'clock, when my host himself knocked at my door, apologized for waking me so early, and suggested that if we were to get through the programme which we had marked out we must make the most of every moment as it flew. The little burn tinkled musically by, within twenty yards of my chamber window, leaping down from craggy shelf to shelf, always merry, always with a great play of white curls upon its brow, always cool and soothing. In this tiny mountain streamlet there were plenty of that particular kind of burn trout which some men speak of with contempt ; which few but worm-fancying boys angle for ; yet which make a most toothsome breakfast-dish when the choice of viands is limited, as it is apt to be in those remote hills, in a month like June, when neither grouse, wild fowl, nor birds are available.

For half an hour, while the man was getting ready the ponies, I stepped out upon the dewy heather, armed with a delicate little trout-rod, taken from the rack in the passage. I never found out where that rod was made, but for burn trout fishing it was a very excellent weapon. When it was shut up within itself (for it was telescopic in make) it resembled

an ordinary japanned walking-stick with a round knob. Opened out it was little longer than a coach-whip, and not at all heavy, though it was made of tubular metal. I believe a friend of my friend had picked this toy up somewhere on the Continent, and presented it to a sportswoman who was in the habit of visiting the highlands every year. The rod answered well with the burn trout, of which in the short time above mentioned I twitched out two dozen ; or, making allowances for stoppages, about one per minute. The fly was a rough and not a very small black gnat, and at this the troutlets dashed with all the airs and graces of a Loch Tay salmon. Jock, the understrapper about Glenalken, having nothing else to do, and there being no "whusky" or handy tap at that preternaturally early hour, had followed up the burn, impregnating the sweet mountain air with a stinking pipe. He watched my proceedings with a sarcastic smile upon his grizzled face, and by-and-by, when I literally whipped out, flying in the air, another troutlet, ejaculating—

"That makes twelve fish, Jock!"

"Fush!" he said with lofty scorn ; "d'ye call that a fush? I call it a fengerlin'."

The reader, when he goes to Scotland, should bear this rebuke in remembrance. He should apply the sacred term "fish" to nothing but migratory *Salmonidae*. As the man in the stubble brings down a bird, but never shoots a partridge, so, upon a salmon river, the angler shows his ignorance if he applies the word "fish" to any but a sea-going *salmo*—say, either *salar* or *trutta*. The burn trout is, therefore, by the same token, a fingerling.

The sun rose boldly over the shoulder of Great Howlen when we were half a mile from Glenalken Lodge. How clear and champagny in its exhilarating effects was that atmosphere! Away from the world, determined to throw

care to the winds, with at least sixteen hours of a superb June day before us, we seemed too full of admiration and quiet delight to speak to each other. The sky at first was of a delicate French-grey tint. Then, imperceptibly, as it seemed to me, there was a pulsation behind the unfolding curtains of Heaven, and lines of light, that had been just touched by the sun in their hasty darting, spread out fan-wise. Next, impalpable and swift, came another change, so that in the twinkling of an eye the canopy overhead became dappled. The dapples flushed faintly, and hung out streamers of faint pink, and then, at last, all the mountains in that direction were goldened by the god of day stretching forth his hands upon the glad world.

Parker and myself, from the backs of our hardy Shetlanders, watched this magnificent process. If he felt as I did, he was very humble during those few minutes, and very much inclined to worship something. The ponies had enough to do to pick their way over the rocks, and Jock seemed to surlily ignore everything. The whole three of them, I suspect, had seen the same kind of thing a hundred times before, and held it cheap. The way in which Parker and I passed off our sensations was characteristic of an affectation cultivated by Englishmen who want to be thought knowing and self-contained. We did not burst into raptures. We interchanged no notes of admiration. In point of fact, we never uttered a word. Yet that extraordinary poem which was taken for Swinburne's in the *Dismal Britain* magazine was Parker's veritable composition, and no doubt a faithful record of the inward gush to which he abandoned himself at the time; while, for myself, I can answer for about as much honest emotion as I and the pony could carry.

In five or six minutes after the sun looked over Glenalcken's round shoulder the country was bathed in a flood of

unadulterated sunshine, and we dismissed the matter from our minds. We were ourselves again.

“Two dozen trouts caught with a fly, a sensational sunrise, and a mile and a half of hillside, jogging on a pony not much bigger than a sewer rat,” I remarked at length. “Not bad for half-past four in the morning.”

Parker was lost in thought, but Jock, who trudged stolidly along near me, grunted, “Call ‘em fengerlens, call ‘em fengerlens !”

Had it been possible to ascend in a balloon from Glenalken we should have seen that the configuration of the immediate point of country for which we were bound, and which we duly reached at six o’clock, was, roughly speaking, that of a human face. Titanic rocks springing fantastically up from the sea-shore represented the hair. A heathery ridge formed a nose a mile long. East Haugh and West Haugh were the cheeks, high and prominent, and hard like those of Highland Jock himself; and the two lochs, deep set between the hills, were a lovely pair of shining eyes. A bit of bog stretching across the lower moor would answer for mouth, and the snug little lodge in which we had slept might have roughly come in for chin. Now, the most essential part of the face of man or beast is the eye. This is the tell-tale which denotes or conceals character. And, all this being interpreted, means that we had ridden up the hills in order to fish the lochs.

We dismounted at the eastern loch to begin with, took our modest bottles of milk, and hard-boiled eggs, and bread and butter, seated on a mossy boulder half in and half out of the water, and meanwhile sent Jock across to a shepherd’s hut with the ponies. The light breeze, a trifle salted, came graciously from the rock-bound shore, stealing down the sides of the Glenalken nose, and tickling the loch into a steady laughing ripple. Not a bird, or beast, or

tree was to be seen or heard. The silence, the loneliness were absolute, for the breath of the morning was not yet sufficiently deep to enable us to hear the tongues of the wavelets licking and lapping at the boulders upon the shore. I scanned the water in vain for a sign of trout rising.

"The trout never do rise here," offhandedly explained Parker, who had had some experience of the place and its sport, and was inclined to lay down the law.

"Ye're wrang," snarled Jock, who had now returned, and was putting his master's rod together. "They're reesin' noo."

Then I observed, not the sort of rise to which we are accustomed in the south, but an almost imperceptible disturbance of the slope of an occasional ripple. The water was not broken or ringed, but it was moved ever so little from below. Jock, after we had conciliated him with a dram, which operated upon his temper like magic, and sweetened his sour old face and voice on the spot, assured us that we were in for a good thing. An offering of Cavendish from my pouch made him more genially disposed towards myself personally, but he was so good as to refer to my favourite eleven-foot trout-rod as "that thing." He, moreover, gave me to understand that I need not fash myself about fine gut collars, or small flies, in that the trout of his native lochs required no nonsense of that kind. Still, I stuck to the trusted, single-handed rod, though I soon discovered that his large, gaudy flies, tied on coarse gut, did best, and that the gut of the flies rendered a heavy casting line to correspond a necessity.

The first trout was mine. Parker was working hard with his double-handed rod further along the shore, and shouted to me that he had missed two fish that rose simultaneously at his first and last fly, he having four flies altogether upon

his cast. I preferred two only, a bright, red-bodied affair for the end, and an orange, with woodcock wing for the dropper, which the wind assisted me to bob very prettily upon the top. A long cast out into the lake was of no use whatever. What answered best was a cast down the wind and parallel with the shore. After getting my first trout upon the dropper I had either a rise or fish at every throw, and occasionally a brace at a time. At eleven o'clock Parker rejoined me, and we sounded a halt for luncheon.

Jock counted the fish as we ate our cold chicken and drank loch water, rendered harmless by an infusion of Glenlivat. The worthy Hielanman took his Glenlivat neat, slyly remarking that he never liked to mix two good things, and, evidently upon principle, taking the whisky to-day and the water to-morrow, or, perhaps, the next Sunday morning. Parker's basket contained sixteen trout : in my bag there were twenty-two. They were yellow, darkly spotted, burly fish, of herring size, and as like in size, shape, and characteristics as peas. Merrier fish never came at a fly, and with our strong tackle we gave them no quarter. My small light rod in the operation of landing (without a net) placed me at a slight disadvantage as to time, but I took out the balance in the enforced extra playing of the game.

Parker, I may remark, thought poorly of this loch business, and was anxious to cross the bridge of the imaginary nose, and poke into that other shining eye (it was dark brown after the wind rose) upon the other side. The Scotch angler who is an adept at salmon and sea-trout fishing despises, or affects to despise, this dainty sport in the lochs. Parker had kindly sacrificed himself so far for me, but I could see that he had had enough, and wanted to be in the boat on the other loch, where the trout ran into pounds. I was not unwilling. I had most thoroughly enjoyed my time, and would not accept his friendly suggestion to remain at the

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water, and leave him to cross Glenalken alone. So we went our way in company, Jock following with the ponies.

At some period unknown to man, and in some manner which no one attempts even to guess at, pike obtained entrance into the western loch. Jock's notion is that amongst some foreign breed of trout once turned in as an experiment there must have been an infantile jack or two. However, be that as it may, the pike are there, and there they will remain unless they are some day gifted with the power of travelling over Glenalken to the other lake on foot. One result of this intrusion is that none but big trout of over three pounds are ever, or scarcely ever, taken. With these Parker would have fair play with his mighty two-hander.

The boat was small and rickety. Jock and our two selves were a full cargo, and when afloat our craft was pretty well down below Plimsoll Mark. This mattered not much, after all, for I elected to sit in the stern, and trail behind with a hand-line for pike, which, if out of season, were better altogether out of the water in which they have chosen to instal themselves as vermin, to be slain at any and at all times. We had three hours' paddling slowly about upon this lovely June day, and Parker killed two brace of brown-backed, coarse-headed, trout, marked like a plum pudding, and magnificently fierce when hooked.

They leaped out of the water, flashing with ruddy gold, and fought doggedly up to the very boat. My phantom gudgeon made satisfactory account of seven pike of about five pounds each—pale, lanky, miserable creatures, whose bodies we left afterwards upon the heather for the use of any carrion-eating birds or animals that might discover them. Parker's fish, weighed at night, were entered in the lodge register at 15 lbs. They had been taken with large flies made at Inverness.

Jock was despatched home in the afternoon with the fish and other baggage upon a loose pony that he had really come to fetch. Parker and I followed a path along the coast, and arrived at the village of Stornally at six o'clock. This secluded fishing community is on the northern shore of the narrow salt-water loch whose name it bears. A stiff jolly-boat was ready for us, with a couple of men, one of whom could not speak a word of English, and who gruffly swore that he hoped he would never be guilty of doing so. After a hasty and not elaborate high tea, we went out to fish for saithe and lythe. Parker still wielded his double-hander, and used a monstrous white and red fly. The boatman put me in charge of a couple of short, stiff saplings, to which were attached strong sea-fishing lines, upon the snooding of which were coarsely-whipped bunches of dirty white wool, tied to large hooks. Yet they fulfilled the beneficent purposes for which they were rudely designed. They were fatal to the coal-fish.

We had long hours since seen the sun rise over Glenalken, and now we saw it slope down towards the ocean, amidst the unspeakable splendours of cloudland. We had fiery red mountains in the sky, orange-tipped pinnacles, prairies of copper-hued strata, lakes of pure pale gold, and finally a succession of fairy-like purples and violets. The southern shore of the arm of the sea, from whose bosom we gazed upwards upon this dream of beauty, was overlooked by a range of hill clothed to the summit with dark green firs. A dozen boats like our own, only with sapling-rods stuck out in all directions, moved at measured speed to and fro. The laughter, song, and converse of the fishermen sounded clear.

Fish leaped everywhere, their object being apparently to catch a momentary reflection of the departing sun-rays, and take it down to their weedy homes. The one thing which

somewhat interfered with our enjoyment of this amazing scene of tranquil splendour was the constant demands upon our attention by the feeding fish. They positively refused to leave our flies alone. With my pair of poles it was one off and another on, and very often, two on together. If I never had a brisk bit of sport before I certainly had it that evening. All the boats seemed to be equally successful, and when dusk crept insinuatingly down the hills and stole over the face of the waters we were at the uncouth jetty—some half-dozen boats, the roomy bottoms of which were heaped with fish varying from two to nine pounds. This was one of the very few gratifying occasions in my life when I needed not to take the trouble to count what I had caught.

Burn trout and sunrise, loch trout and pike during the sunny day, coal-fish and a never-to-be-forgotten scene above and below at sunset—these made up, if a long and tiring, still a superlatively lovely June day on the western coast of bonny Scotland.

## CHAPTER IX.

## A QUIET EVENING.

JUST as no cockney can enjoy the delirious delights of London city like the provincial cousin who comes up for a brief period every year, so no dweller in the country keenly appreciates the charms of rural life as does the true Londoner, baked, busy, bothered, bored, rushing away now and then for a transitory sojourn amongst green pastures by still waters. On a July morning I met a friend on 'Change, full of the benefits he and his family had received from a month's residence in a certain village retreat in one of the Home Counties. He ran through a catalogue such as—strawberries, cream, fresh eggs, peas, roses, currants, salads, hayfields, and so on; but I most pricked up my ears when he added,—

“ And such trout-fishing I never had in my life.”

This statement aroused my interest, and I had soon drawn from him all the information he could convey. As the practical conclusion of our interview, I bore with me, on departure from him, a pencilled instruction to the agent in charge of the water to allow me, the bearer, to fish.

London now suddenly became intolerable. I soon persuaded myself that a quiet evening in the country was not only a privilege at my command, but an absolute necessity on a day when the thermometer registered eighty-four degrees, though dull clouds covered the heavens. It was half-

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past eleven, or thereabouts, when my friend parted from me in Cornhill ; at half-past four I was at the village retreat, looking down from a wooden bridge upon the streamlet.

A strong wind blew straight down the water, but it was a warm, west wind, and would probably die away towards night. About a mile of stream was at my disposal, and to fish it I had to pass first through a cherry orchard, next through a cottager's garden, next through a bit of marsh, next through a field where the mowers would no doubt be working on the morrow, and finally by the skirts of a coppice. A queer, little out-of-the-way trout stream it was to be within so short a distance of London, to be so little known, yet to contain so many fish. There were, in truth, too many by half. From the rustic bridge at the head of the water I could see their brown forms lying on the yellow gravel of the subaqueous clearings and scours, or, almost black in colour, keeping close to the sides. The stream at first was a mere babbling brook, and though it twisted and changed its soils and its character, it only at one point deserved the title of river. As I never venture on a fishing excursion without waders—and have never had cause to regret the resolution—I was able to take liberties that would otherwise have been out of the question.

For example, noticing a pound trout in a clear runlet between the crowfoot beds, I went below, stepped in, and, more out of curiosity than anything else, opened an attack upon him with a small alder. I wanted to see how the trout would regard the fly, how rise at it, how behave should I, after all, hook him. My casting was not by any means workmanlike, yet the fish was not scared. Several times the little fly fell above, and floated directly over him. There was on each presentation a slight movement of the fins, which prompted me to persevere, and at last I saw his

troutship rise bodily, lazily tilt up his head, and open his mouth. There was no rise visible on the surface of the water, so insidious was this process, which I could watch with amusing ease. The wrist, of course, instinctively obeyed the eye, and before I quite realized that my bare-faced proceeding had succeeded, the trout was racing down stream amongst the weeds, and making for a willow-root below. He was out of my control very soon, and got away with the hook. Three times in succession I tried for fish that were almost under my eye, hooked them—and lost them. The flies were atrociously tied, and the fine gut was outrageously rotten. The wind was very contrary, too, and down came a crop of weeds in short lengths, with miscellaneous muck, that fouled my flies at every cast. At six o'clock I had not therefore taken a single fish, and my aspiration for a quiet evening in the country seemed likely to be fulfilled much too literally.

The cottager's garden proved more profitable than the cherry orchard. The flowering rows of peas broke the wind, and the tall potato foliage gave me cover. Or, perhaps, it was the red ant which I here attempted for the first time. Anyhow, I passed out of the little wicket and across the lane into the marsh two fish the richer, having thrown in three troutlets that had sported on the shallowest of shallows. The stream now ran over a softer bed, and was deeper, having escaped, somewhere in a nook which I avoided, from a sluice, and widened out. Presently the still reach was broken by a very slight weir, and under the woodwork of the sides, peering over cautiously, I counted twenty-two trout, dark-coloured, broad-shouldered, and all full pounders. One fellow was grabbing trifles that came down in a stickle so very low that his back fin was half the time above the surface. These fish did not appear to resent my presence, and they certainly took no notice of any fly I offered them.

Below, there came another short length of still, deep water, and this I tried with a larger fly, which the wind assisted me to use. A trout just under, and another just over a pound, were escorted to shore here, and into my basket. They were pale and stupid, for they lost their bloom quickly, and scarcely fought better than a chub.

The grass-field I had to enter by means of a plank across the brook. In the centre I paused to charge my pipe, and substitute for the red ant a small coachman. As a matter of fact I put on the coachman first, and cast down the stream principally to keep the line from blowing into the hazel bushes while I paused to overhaul my pouch. When I essayed to draw it in, pulling the fly without heed against the stream, a lusty trout plunged and took it. I had now to clamber over a fence and follow the unexpected game down stream, a most difficult operation, executed without mishap, and adding to my increasing spoil a pound and a quarter fish. This fellow was of unexceptional condition and shape, and thereby a marked contrast to some of the others.

Thus, taking one here, and another there, the quiet evening drawing on apace, the wind sobbing to sleep, the cattle coming down for their evening drink, the moths appearing, the corn-crake calling, and subtle essences of new-mown hay, sweetbriar, and honeysuckle alternating as I sauntered along, did I pick up a fish until their united weight impressed itself sharply upon my shoulder. The little coachman and the fine cast were well tried, and not found wanting. The large alder I had only used in the heavier water. For the rest of the evening I had no occasion to change the coachman, nor did I with it miss a rise or lose a fish.

The quiet evening compensated for the adverse wind and detestable weeds that at the commencement threatened to

overwhelm me with disappointment. All around was calm and beautiful in the summer prime. Men and women, having toiled all day in the fields, were slowly returning across the footpath, to the well-earned repose of their humble homes. Bats wheeled in erratic flight; laggard rooks hastened with noisy chorus to the elm-tops. Having put something by this time into my basket, I found it easy to be calm as the surroundings, and whipped my tranquil way back to the weir where the big trout lay. By dint of patient kneeling (which can always be safely done with wading gear, and is indeed a strong reason why I always take it) and leisurely casts, I got out another brace of fish that ought to have been a fourth as heavy as they were. Still they were game and welcome.

Near the picturesque bridge at the head of the water a miller and a farm-labourer idly, and at peace apparently with all the world, leaned over the crumbling wall, and above and below we could hear the trout breaking the surface. The cottager's garden was pervaded with the escaping smoke of the faggots on the ruddy hearth. The woods to the west were darkening quickly. I believe that in the soothing influences of this sweet rural nook, I wasted ten dreamy minutes which might have brought me half as many trout, but it was a waste which was not evil either in itself or consequences. And there was a good deal of human nature in that waste of opportunity. Had the basket at his back been empty, the angler, fuming and fretting, would, no doubt, have been flogging and floundering in his desperate endeavour to succeed, if ever so modestly. But he was, for a wonder, content, and everything seemed, as a consequence, beautiful and in harmony. He even forgot his own cares, and follies, and foibles, and the world generally seemed a vastly different thing by comparison with what it was on hot 'Change not ten hours before.

One choice bit of water remained for the last. It was above the cottager's garden, and was the disturbed pool, streaming pear-shaped, from an outlet dividing the upper from the lower division of the stream. There must be trout there, and on that belief I had given it rest when I descended the hill-side on my arrival. Knee deep, net in hand, I whipped this musical flow in the gathering dusk, catching a long, lanky, dark, twelve-inch trout, gaunt as a pike, and three half-pounders, that were as comely as he was ugly.

Then, all being over with my chances, I retired to the meadow, and heaped the contents of the basket, now full to the cover, upon the grass. Between six and nine o'clock I had obtained eleven brace and a half of trout. If the number had been eighty brace it would have been better for the bonny stream, for the bad condition of many of the fish was due to nothing but over population, which is good for neither man, beast, nor fish. My quiet evening ended with a drive under the moonlight through scented lanes to the station, and at midnight a fine dish of trout was transferred to the shelf of a London larder by a satisfied sportsman, whose every gesture said as plainly as spoken words—"I have done the trick. Amen."

## CHAPTER X.

## MY SATURDAY OUT.

IT was my Saturday out, and the crucial question with me was—Roach-rod or fly? Solace of some description I required from a sea of imaginary troubles—almost as bad as real ones, to a dyspeptic man. The cats had ruined my pet calcularias ; the editor had written, suggesting that, on the whole, I had better take a month's leave, as my contributions were growingly and alarmingly stale ; and, altogether, the world seemed to be wagging all awry, as if it were as bilious as I was. Some men under these circumstances would have flown to the bottle. But that was not my panacea. Into my den did I, though heavy hearted, repair, and began to forage amongst my rods. There was magic in their touch. My panacea was the riverside. My troubles flew a rapid flight up the chimney, and the only weight that lay upon my heart, now that I was confronted with the inanimate companions of many a glorious outing, was the above-stated question—Roach-rod or fly?

When, down at the end of the osier-bed, I found one of the best of our roaching worthies with four fish as the result of four hours' careful fishing, I rather congratulated myself that I had chosen, after all, the little single-handed rod which I had last used to some purpose on the occasion written about in the previous chapter. The veteran roacher confessed that his fish were not biting, but that the chub and dace

had been rising all the forenoon. I sat down, watching and admiring his skill. The tight line method, with only a few inches of strike, and a single hair collar, I cannot manage. The unshipping of an eighteen or twenty-two foot rod at the taking of every fish, and at every loss of bait, is hateful to me, the fact being that I am a poor roach fisherman from a Lea man's point of view. The swim by which I sat under the waving withies, bordered with willow herbs as high as my breast, and a mass of mauve blossoms, was a very good one, and we knew it to abound with pound and pound-and-a-half fish. The four specimens that had been caught were over a pound each, but they were not thoroughly in condition. There was a suspicion of slime upon them; their bellies were straight, and their bodies thin, while there was a paleness in their colouring, very different from the rich hues which September and October will bring forth.

You perceive, good reader, that my brother angler was having a Saturday out too. Who knows but that a tide of troubles had overwhelmed him too, and that it was sweet solace, and not gross weight, that had tempted him to this corner on a July afternoon, when the heat seduced you into the land of Nod, and you would have gone there if the gnats from the osiers had not leagued together to forbid? Repose and quiet; the heavy scent of the meadow-sweet, just now full of creamy ripeness; the occasional cry of pain from the whetstoned scythe, and the laughter of women raking the odorous hay-gathering, better late than never: one angler perseveringly fishing his swim, and full of confidence that in the evening it would be well with him, and another angler delightfully dreaming while his fly-cast streamed out like a pennant—these were the principal features of that half-hour's idling by the osier-bed.

Ineffably serene, I sauntered down the water. The sun blazed with dog-day force, but south-west, over the beech-

woods, where somebody was shooting rabbits, there was moving surely up a steel-blue cloud with an escort of dirty white fleeces. It was a thunderstorm, that would apparently break further up the country. I retain the old-fashioned faith in the non-biting of fish before a thunderstorm, though I have known instances where the rule has been proved by notable exceptions. But the fish are so keenly affected by elemental disturbances, that I am convinced their instinct tells them whether the storm, be it rain or thunder, is coming or merely threatening. Still, these things are mysteries. The influence of weather upon fish and fishing has been a subject upon which most angling authorities love to dogmatize. But whatever we may surmise, we have no definite knowledge. My own custom is to fish on, let the weather be what it will. That is precisely what I did down stream. Soon there was not a breath of wind.

Such a calm is bad in fly-fishing for such very shy fish as the large chub and dace of which we have a plenteous store. And somehow the dace had not yet got well upon the shallows. A certain ford, from which of an evening I have taken, without shifting my position, a dozen and a half of dace averaging ten ounces apiece, did not yield me a touch. But July, it must be remembered, unless the previous portion of the summer has been unusually warm, is quite early enough for coarse fish to rise at a fly; and this year the season was notoriously backward. I put up five wild ducks, anyhow, in one of the meadows, and in a piece of dead water, of all places in the stream, I saw one of those big trout, that never take a fly, chivy a shoal of fry up and across. The tyrant ploughed a decent wave as he went, and the little fish fluttered and fell like a small cascade of silver.

The thunderclouds travelled slowly into Buckinghamshire, leaving behind others that obscured the sun for the rest of

the afternoon. This gave me a chance, and, with a dry fly, I managed to get three or four dace. The fish, however, were rising short, and, do what I would, I could not nick them. Over the foot-bridge was an islet, the headquarters of the enterprising firm of Moorhen, Dabchick, and Company, whose commercials were busy everywhere. There was a thicket of reed-mace at the lower end that for lustiness of growth you shall not equal. Its dark green swords cluster close, and it is always in motion, rustling softly in summer; and in winter, when it becomes straw coloured, and a collection of tall, dry spears, with tasselled heads, it rattles weirdly. There is shade under them, especially at the lower point of the islet, where, between the two streams, there is a good lay-by for all kinds of fish.

This is a harbour which we always try in passing. On the 1st of April the earliest man down stream launched his Alexandra fly thither, and took the first trout of the season. The first jack will probably be found there, too. My red palmer has to pitch on that outstanding picket of the reed-mace phalanx, and I have to coax it into dropping softly off. It does so, and you may see for yourself that something follows it slowly, but always at a safe distance. This is one of the provoking tricks of the chub of the period, and, without arousing his suspicions by a second cast, which might or might not precipitate a crisis, we will pass on to the scour, where, if anywhere, the dace should be, for it is nicely gravelled, has a good flow of rippling water, and has been cleansed of weeds for our special behoof. Here the old game is repeated. If you offer them a dry fly, the fish rise short; if you sink it, they follow it and leave it alone. Well, one good turn deserves another. Let us leave *them* alone.

Sit you down, my friend, under the haycock, close to the hedge that already shows a vast quantity of berries, where, in May, there was a wonderful show of hawthorn bloom.

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Let me relieve my mind, here and now, of a few remarks upon the general question of dace-fishing with the artificial fly. With so many dace rivers within afternoon distance of London, there ought to be a larger proportion of fly-fishers than there are amongst London anglers. The amusement is exceedingly pretty, and fairly remunerative ; and it is admirable practice for future campaigns against the trout. The Trent men beat the fly-fishers of Thames and Lea—beat them hollow. Some ten or twelve miles below Nottingham I once assisted a working-man angler to count his day's take of fish, and with one small black gnat he had basketed over twelve dozen of nine-inch dace. They were not large fish, but they had been artistically caught with fine tackle, and were, to my humble thinking, a very enviable display.

Sportsmen frequently aver that they would prefer killing one Thames trout to ten thousand dace. Be it so. I knew a gentleman who went twelve times to a Thames weir, at a cost of a few shillings under ten pounds. In return he had a five-pound trout. This gave him one sensation. The Trent man in his day on a public river had enjoyed at least 150 sensations, without reckoning misses at rising fish. There is also the chance of a chub, or even roach. The latter you can never reckon upon, but occasionally, in the very hot months, surprising takes of roach are unexpectedly had with a fly. Practise fly-fishing for dace, young angler. The light equipment will be a change from the heavy baggage of the ordinary bottom-fisher ; the operation is cleanly and not monotonous ; and with the finest of tackle, which is imperative, it is sport not to be ashamed of to fairly catch even so small a fish as a four-ounce dace.

And now come on to the bottom of the water. The broad-leaved stuff which attracts your attention is the

burdock. There is also coltsfoot. Young beggars that we were, we learned, in the schoolboy era, how to smoke with the dried leaves that we found amongst the barnyard straw. In the early spring the plant throws up a flower, long before a sign of leaf appears. So much for coltsfoot, and the singular reversal of the common custom of flowering plants.

On either side of the broad water below the ford, and its trout hovers, the river makes distinct streams, divided by heavy weed banks in the centre. Here, in the slack water, at the tails of weedy subaqueous coppices, lie the chub, two, three, four pounders, and plenty of them. Between six o'clock and dark on a close, still, summer evening is the prime opportunity for chub. This grand fringe of willow-herb major makes excellent hiding. And see the result! A chub that must be at least two pounds' weight has taken the smallest coachman but one that is manufactured, and a dead weight he is, as you may observe, upon this cast, than which only drawn gut can be finer. There is no risk of anything now but the weeds, out of which the fish must be kept at all hazards. After the first rush no angler has any business to lose a hooked chub. Slip the net under his bronzed shoulders, and bear me witness that he is three pounds, if the pocket scales lie not.

Eight dace weighing four pounds and a half, the very chubby chub afore-named (for he is of his kind remarkably comely, and well preserved), and two chublings constitute my Saturday-out basket. It is a long tramp through coarse grass yet uncut, and swathes of hay levelled since morning, back to the roach-fisher. And what a day he has been having! What a mistake I made when I settled that question in the morning in favour of the fly-rod! About four o'clock, it seems, the prediction of the roach-fisher that in the evening it would be well with him, began to bear abundant fulfilment. The quill float went out of sight with

welcome regularity. Not a swim was barren. The angler had made his own ground-bait, which he dispensed sparingly. He had used a pea-sized bait of paste, and he invariably wrapped it up in a thin layer of ground-bait. This husk, of course, speedily washed off, and the roach came in a hurry for the kernel, as they were intended to do, much astonished, no doubt, at the wicked barb imbedded within it. The grand total was, as near as I could judge, 40 lbs. or roach; and there were certainly not fifty fish. But who can foretell these eventualities? Deliberately I had selected the fly-rod, and though the bottom-fisher put me in the shade, and, so to speak, sat upon me, I was happy. In angling, as in the more weighty concerns of life, it is a good thing to let your riches, so far as in you lies, consist in the fewness of your wants.

## CHAPTER XI.

## THE MILL POOL.

THERE are some people, I believe, who find their highest enjoyment in an invitation to dinner. In this life a banquet of numerous courses is their crowning delight, and I suspect that if they knew that in the world to come there was no dining and giving of dinners they would go through the remainder of their lives as men absolutely without hope. Certain limp young folks pretend that five o'clock tea is the sign of a pure spirit and high culture. I am acquainted with some City men who find an irresistible attraction in a, 'nice little luncheon, don't you know ?' Now, for *a man*, by which I mean a human being, whose head is screwed on properly, whose body is sound, and whose tastes lie in the direction of outdoor sports, there is no more welcome sound than "Come to breakfast with me, and we can drive down afterwards."

Such an invitation I received from my friend Darkor Evans, who is a bachelor, and lives in what he calls "modest diggings" on the other side of the East of London. I met him first of all on the outskirts of the Stock Exchange, where we were both waiting for a mutual friend, who had the run of the sacred enclosure, and whose opinion we wished to consult. Our journey to the City that afternoon bore, however, this only one result, that Darkor Evans and myself struck up an acquaintance in front of a case of very

handsome trout. The worthy stockbroker, having privately broken bread and eaten salt with us both elsewhere, invited us to his office, where, amidst all the paraphernalia of money-making and money-losing, there were one or two old oil paintings, chiefly of tumbling rivers and foaming cataracts ; but, above all, a case of four trout, averaging 4 lbs. a piece, all taken by our friend, with a small Alexandria fly of his own invention, a sample of which was hung in a corner of the aforesaid case, that all men might know by those presents how the trout were slain. There was more work, however, to be done down Hercules Passage, and so the financier hurried off at the call of a clerk, and Mr. Darkor Evans and myself strolled away westward. It was on parting he said, " You come to breakfast with me, and we can drive down afterwards."

Very nice little "diggings" they were down Essex way in which that gay bachelor, Mr. Darkor Evans, contrived to spend his spare hours. They reeked, if I may use the expression, with an atmosphere of gun and rod, and with all sorts of curiosities that had been brought from different parts of the world by sea-captains, whom, in the way of business, he had met.

Breakfast was over before nine o'clock, and then we heard the crunch of wheels on the gravel outside, so light that it might have been made by an overgrown perambulator instead of a trim little Norwich cart, drawn by a chestnut pony—pretty in appearance, pretty in action, and pretty in ability to get over ten miles an hour, four hours at a stretch, without winking. Our rods and tackle fitted well into the back of this vehicle, and we were without loss of time bowling along by a large lake, in which Evans told me there were some artful carp and tench that defied the angler's baits. Then we turned down a new road, and just touched a bit of rare old Epping Forest, which we were

nearly losing, but which just then, thanks to the much-abused Corporation of the City of London, had been declared at last, what was left of it, for ever free to the people.

Upon that blithe morning the birds were singing apparently everywhere ; birds that we could see, birds that we knew were only on the other side of the hedges, and birds that seemed to be lost in the blue overhead but for the reminder they sent down, filtered as it were through the air, that they were still alive and happy, and would by-and-by return. There was one bright-eyed, speckled-throated thrush, sitting on a bare-limbed tree, that would never more bear leaves, pouring out a perfect flood of melody, and very different it was to the discordant notes of one or two jays which we could hear, but not see. By-and-by a rabbit scuttled across the road, though a long distance ahead, drawing from D. E. the remark that he had frequently driven along that highway, but had not there seen a bit of fur for the last ten years.

The joyousness of our little trip was increased by the crisp air of the September morning. The gossamer webs of the spider were suspended in glistening threads from hedge to hedge, clear evidence that we were the first travellers who had passed that way since yesternight. The heavy dew still hung upon all the foliage, bringing out incipient hues of decay which appeared here and there upon the earliest leaf-shedders of the hedges. This is a kind of morning upon which the spirits are bound to rise, and upon which, speeding swiftly along a hard road with country surroundings, a man is able, though it may be for a very brief period, to shake off any troubles which may weigh upon the mind.

At the mill we were made heartily welcome, but we wasted no time in speech-making, merely exchanging some

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cheery sentences while the pony was being taken round to the stables. We were getting ready our fishing-gear, which Ben, the miller's man, bore away to the grotto, which was not a grotto in the dictionary sense, but a piece of old-fashioned garden-ground adjoining the mill pool. Refusing breakfast, we promised to come up to luncheon, and made our way at once to the edge of the fir-trees which fringed the whole side of the pool, remarking as we went that we were in for a warm day ; for the dew had already been licked up by the sun, and there was a growing mugginess perceptible which rather indicated something in the nature of a thunderstorm.

A mill pool is a mill pool wherever it may be, and it has been so often described that there is no necessity for saying anything more about this particular pool than that it was large, and in the centre deep, and fishy in appearance. A mill pool, however, should always be carefully surveyed by the angler, for, although sometimes the fish which it contains will be all over the water, taking promiscuously, they have their haunts, which it requires a practised eye to detect. Assuming, by permission, the *rôle* of Mentor, I advised D. E. that it would be of no use his trying the heavy water, which he felt at first inclined to do, but that he could reach the comparatively still part with his roach-rod by using a pretty long strike. The owner of the mill, who was not at all like the typical miller of Tennyson, but would pass very well for a fashionable man in Pall Mall, was a thoughtful gentleman, and his sole aim this morning seemed how to make us comfortable. He had surmised that the grass would be damp with dew, and, as we prepared for fishing, the under-gardener appeared with a couple of kale-pots and two smooth pieces of board, with which he constructed a pair of seats over the swims which we elected to fish. This was a capital contrivance, for by-and-by we

utilized the kale-pots for the reception of fish. Evans equipped his roach-rod, and I went to the tail of his swim with the leger apparatus.

The roach-rod scored first with a chub of over 2 lbs., which got into the mill rush, and made a momentary show of fight, but for all that made his last flop into the landing-net. A couple of lively dace followed in succession upon my leger line, and between the capture of these two fish Evans took a good roach. He had not long rebaited before he was fighting with something that got off. I had left my seat to assist him in the landing, and arrived in time to hear and join in the execration which all of us emit at such a result. The hook was nearly straightened, evoking another execration this time upon the scamping maker who had palmed off such goods upon honest Waltonians. My friend, however, warned me to retreat, remarking that the top of my rod was trembling like an aspen leaf. This was caused by a nice perch, which had hooked himself in my absence.

Sport waxing slack, I turned my attention to the fly-rod, starting at the top of the backwater, and whipping steadily towards the cottage below. There were a few trout, but I had scarcely hope of getting these with the flies which I had put upon my cast, and which were intended chiefly for chub or dace. In the course of half an hour I got a brace of decent chub, which were lying on the shallows, and which demanded a kneeling upon the bank behind some low willows, and a long cast. As I was using a medium-sized red hackle there was no chance of a dace, but as an enormous quantity of these fish were spread over the pebbly shallows, and frequently came, after the manner of dace, a long distance after the fly, once or twice giving the hackle a pluck without taking the hook, I substituted a small coachman. This, the fly-fisher may say, was not the thing to do in the middle of a September day, for all fly-fishing litera-

ture marks out the coachman as an evening fly. I confess I have never done much with the coachman in a trout stream until evening, but with dace in the Colne, on the Lea, and in mill tails have often caught fish during the summer months at all hours of the day with a cast upon which were nothing but coachman and governor. My confidence in the pretty little white wing was fully justified by the results. In twelve casts I got six dace that were nearer half a pound than a third of a pound, and that were such an even lot that they were well worth setting up in a case as a specimen of what might be done in a quarter of an hour with the fly-rod.

While crouching upon the margin, and whipping out the line for a long cast, I observed on the further side of the shallow, close to some overhanging willow bushes, a boil and splash, followed by a shoal of dace, great and small, playing hop, skip, and jump upon the surface in all directions. This was a bold invitation, which I accepted by retreating quietly, returning to the grotto, and substituting jack tackle upon my leger rod, and the smallest of the dace I had taken.

The bait went over towards the willows freely and fairly, and it had not made three movements towards me before there was a smart run : the fish was in a feeding humour, for it only moved about a yard, and the line at once commenced that vibrating motion which indicates a business-like intenton the part of a pouching fish. He did pouch, and came to me in due time, a jack of about 3 lbs., singularly short and thick.

I took the pike round to friend Evans, who had been catching now a chub, now a roach, and very frequently a fat, voracious minnow, which seemed to be bothering his swim a good deal, and then we found to our surprise, by the message delivered to us by the flour-dusted boy, that luncheon was ready ; and we had to leave our sport

indulge in what the City clerks call “a wash and brush up,” and take our seats at our host’s table. It is an awkward predicament to sit out a meal of this kind in the country, where company is always welcome, especially when it assumes the shape of a couple of good-looking fellows from town, who are able to talk all the gossip about actresses and peers and royalty; eager as you may be to go and resume your fishing, equally eager are the ladies to prevent your too hasty escape. It was, therefore, with inward horror, yet with a smiling face, that I found the ladies proposing a game of tennis on the lawn. We could not by any means decline; the brother of these charming damsels had given us a morning’s amusement, with some to follow in the evening, and it would have been selfish indeed if we had not done our best to contribute to the amusement of his fair sisters. The young lady who blessed me with being my partner would no doubt tell you, if you asked her confidentially, that she never had a more stupid tennis mate than I proved to be. Truth to tell, my thoughts were continually drifting down upon those shallows where the dace lay, and under the willow bushes where the jack had made a demonstration. Nevertheless, when tea was brought out, we seized the opportunity of deserting our colours, and going back to our fishing.

Confiding to D. E. my surmise as to big jack lying under the willow bushes, that gentleman cheered my heart by the information that amongst his odds and ends he had taken two or three good gudgeons, and one of them I soon utilized. Taking a preliminary spin or two in the pool by the flood-gates, generally a sure find for a pike, I met with no success, but there was a small eddy between the willow and the overflow in which a fish might be lurking. In a mill pool you scarcely know where a roving jack may not be. I have taken them in the roughest

water, and have often found that if there is an eddy or back current of only a foot or so in width a jack will often lie there. I dropped the gudgeon with a single hook through its lip rather than throw it into the above-mentioned eddy, and in a moment it was shaken as a terrier shakes a rat. A dull, heavy strain succeeded, which a little puzzled me, for it was not at all like the pull of a jack. I got the fish eventually into a heavy rush of water, or perhaps it would be more correct to say that it got me there, necessitating my following it down. There was a roll somewhere near the surface, revealing to me the sinuous length of an enormous eel. Simultaneously with the discovery which had been made, the mill proprietor and myself saw that the brown gudgeon came to the top of the water desolate. The eel after all had not pouched the bait, nor had I, as I supposed, hooked it.

Without loss of time I cast above where the eel and gudgeon had parted company, and, after four or five casts, the dog-like shake was repeated. Now said I to the spectator, coolly puffing his cigar, "I shall give that eel time by my watch; he shall have a quarter of an hour's grace." The time seemed to pass, I must say, very slowly indeed, and all the while the line never moved. It was an even chance whether the eel had left it or not, but I kept to my resolution, and, at the instant that the limit had expired, I winched up and tried conclusions. There was no mistake this time, but there was no net handy, and the master hallooed, and down came one of his men with a strong large net, and a pole seven feet long for a handle.

At luncheon we had been talking about eels, and the mill proprietor had told us of a customer he had in Mark Lane—for he dealt largely in corn as well as flour—who had a special weakness for eels from this water. I therefore insisted upon his accepting this fish as a present, and

I had almost as much tussle with him upon that point as I had had with the eel, which was forthwith sent up to the house that the hook might be extracted, and the question of weight determined in the cook's scales. The fish weighed 4 lbs. 1 oz.

The roach-fisher Evans shared in our astonishment when we walked round and told him of this bit of sport, and he shared in our pleasure also, as any true sportsman will do when a brother has done something better than he has. We were pleased, also, to note that he had still been adding to the contents of his kale-pot, and mostly by contributions of half a pound roach. In order to enjoy a rest I now treated myself to a resumption of legering, and had scarcely settled down to the contemplation of the swallows, which were having fine fun amongst the swarms of flies that had come out, when I was aroused by a demand for the net from my friend Evans, whose long roach-rod, well curved at the slender top, looked uncommonly like mischief, and my fear was that the fish would disappoint him. The angler was equal to the occasion, however, for he turned his fish, though it seemed to have a strange preference for keeping to the bottom. As a matter of fact, for quite a minute, he was unable to move it. In such cases there is but one thing to do when fishing with very fine tackle, viz., to keep a tight line and wait the development of events.

The fish forged out a little, then came back and sulked. I stood by, net in hand, mentally as much playing that fish as the man who had the rod. Slowly at last the fish came out into the quiet water, and I saw a bronzed side gleam. There was another tug of war between the man and the fish, which, as we could now see, was a fine bream. The bellows-shaped fish seemed to know the advantage he had, for he drew across the heavy water, taking an artful advantage of the weight of the current, and doing

his best to escape by sheer inert strength. D. E. brought him to the net, a bream of between five and six pounds.

Leaving my friend, I strolled back to my own rod, and found that the hook had been neatly stripped of the marsh worm while I had been philandering. I had not been long seated before I had a smart tug, which made the reel spin. Now I congratulated myself that I had a short serviceable rod with good running tackle, and it was my turn to yell for the net, though, even as I played and waited, I resolved never again to do what so many couples do in going fishing, viz., commit the folly of taking only one net between two. There is no mistaking the play of bream, and I knew it was a bream that I had hooked. It went every time it had a chance down the heavy water, and I let it go, turning it, however, as soon as it got into the slack. Then it would come up a bit and sheer off again.

This manoeuvre could not be repeated *ad infinitum*, and I at last had the opportunity of putting on some pressure and floating the bream over the net, which received it in its friendly meshes. This fish was a little over 3 lbs. The amused mill proprietor, whose letter-writing that afternoon I am afraid we sadly interfered with, who had been wandering backwards and forwards from his office to the pool, now threw business cares to the wind, and announced his ambition to get a good chub wherewith to crown our take. We had still some time, and the best period of the day for fishing, and Evans took special care, on the renewal of his ground-bait, to exchange the gentles which he had been previously using for paste. At the first swim his quill float just shivered a trifle, and then went down like a dart. The net, of course, was below, where I had last used it, and there was another scamper to and fro in order to land the fish. Three more followed in as many swims, and then I left, for the fish began to rise merrily at the fly, the nearest

resemblance to which was a small red hackle, which would be good for either dace or chub.

Amongst the dace across by the willow bushes, there was a heavier rise than all the rest, and I almost thought it was a trout, but, as soon as I had got the fly over to the spot, I knew by the run that followed that the stricken fish was a chub. It nearly doubled my little rod in the first rush, which was very straight, for the root of a pollard willow. From this I turned it in the very nick of time, and, chub-like, it was not long in giving in, and flopped unresisting into the net. The game having been off and on so merry, the mill proprietor had brought his little spring balance with him, and announced that this capture was an ounce or two under 3 lbs.

If the summons to luncheon had been heard with regret, what can I say of our sensations upon hearing the first dinner-bell? There are occasions when one hears the dinner-bell with as much pleasure, and perhaps more, than the Oriental hears the Muezzin's call to prayer, but this was not such an occasion. Nevertheless, we were informed that we had a quarter of an hour's grace, and during that quarter of an hour I must make my last attempt at that supposititious jack under the willows. And I did so, and got him, a fair seven-pounder, and was able after all to put in my appearance at the dinner-table, contented. We had a very pleasant evening, with a little music, the ladies not only allowing, but insisting upon our smoking, in the little drawing-room opening out into the lawn ; and towards dusk the gallant chestnut pony was spinning across the marshes, while landrails and other birds were calling some times close to us, and again in the distance in the gathering mist.

## CHAPTER XII.

## THE FIRST FROST.

WE had a fine Lord Mayor's Day for once, barring just half an hour of cold rain when the procession was plodding up Fleet Street. It was during the storm, when we were driven in for shelter, that I received an invitation to go down to Hazeltrent on a fishing excursion. For this kind of occupation I never require a second invitation, and being just then out of harness, and, so to speak, eating my head off in idleness, I closed with my young friend, and promised to be with him on the following Sunday. Shirley Bray's father is a parson, a right good fellow ; he believes in vestments, will smoke his pipe between services, and help you in a rational way to make the Sunday a day of pleasure.

But, it would never do for him to encourage actual sport on the sacred day. Personally, I believe, he would see no sin in a quiet angle in the afternoon, but there are the feelings of other people to be considered, and the Rev. T. Bray, M.A., has amongst his parishioners a lot of cantankerous people who were spoiled by his predecessor, who boasted that he had never been inside a theatre, nor tasted ardent spirits. This did not prevent us talking about sport, nevertheless, over the luncheon-table ; and Miss Bray, an amiable lady of, say thirty years, rather egged us on than otherwise to recount our exploits. As Shirley had the year before hunted the buffalo in the Far West, he had the

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pull of me, and I allowed him his head for the time. When the subject was salmon fishing, I got something of a show.

Shirley enticed me away to the stables in the afternoon, and there I found his hunter, and his father's cob surreptitiously saddled. We stole away from the rear, actually through the kitchen-garden, like a couple of thieves, and a narrow lane between two splendid hedges of holly—glowing with both scarlet and yellow berries—received and concealed us. We had a very charming ride, and my observations led me to the conviction that if Master Shirley does not enjoy himself with certain rosy-cheeked farmers' daughters, the fault is nobody's but his own. That, however, is a subsidiary detail. Hazeltrent Rectory is in a southern county, and most of the rectory people are fond of fishing. Seeing the variety of water we passed in the course of our ride, I ventured to express my astonishment to Shirley, who unmistakably turned up his nose, flicked off a solitary leaf that trembled at the end of a vagrant branch, and remarked:—

“ Give me a rat-hunt rather than angling. I'm good for fur or feather, be it never so lowly; but I draw the line at fin.”

And in this reference to the line the innocent youth, I am convinced, was not aware that he was near to a pun. But Shirley looked with a loving eye at a clay-pit which we passed, for in its depth he had in his jacket-and-trousers period caught plenty of perch and tench. Next summer, if I am spared, I shall try that homely little pond myself, since the perch and tench remain, and no angler ever wets line in the water. I am not sure that I should not have given it a turn before breakfast on Monday morning, had the surface not been covered with dead leaves from the fine, aged elm-trees that surround it. After the pond we got

into a bridle-path that led through a wood, in which a few days before there had been some spirited cub-hunting, and as we paced over the damp, thick carpet of leaves, not unpleasantly scented with the breath of decay, I heard the trickle of a brook. This I found was a trout stream a mile or so the other side of the forest. Shirley thought the fish were very few and small, but a smart young gardener with whom I conversed in the granary next day confidentially informed me that in the summer he often gets a dish of a dozen trout a foot long with the worm. The woodland brook I also note, therefore, for future experiment. Then we paused at the head of one of those old-fashioned park lakes where you know by instinct large pike have held possession for generations. The russet reeds surrounded it, moorhens and dabchicks were moving about, and we put up a widgeon from a trench that drained into it. There were three or four places from which the lake could be fished from the bank, and these, too, I put down on the tablets of memory.

The river, however, was the thing we had really come to see, and sad indeed was I to know that the salmon-fishing there closed in October. It did me little good to be informed that a mutual friend had in September caught a twenty-three pounder, and I shall not expose him by describing how he seduced it, unless indeed I find him saying at the club that he took it with a fly. Then it will be my duty to offer an observation. There anyhow was the river, broad, dark in colour, and rolling not too rapidly.

Shirley thought I might see a salmon by peering over the bank into a depth of twelve feet of water. He had often seen one there, he said. I peered, saw no salmon, but such a shoal of roach ! The big fellows were in lazy mood, flocked together close to the bank, and falling back or punting easily forward. They were moving just about

enough to keep the circulation active. Did I not carefully mark that spot too? The reader may be certain that I did so, and that in the rectory dining-room, after evening service, when the soft lamp-light fell upon a lovable family group, and the surroundings were all of harmony and peace, those roach kept floating about in the atmosphere. Even when the gentle Clara, with her deep, flute-like contralto, was persuaded into giving us "Rock'd in the cradle of the deep," as a proper compromise between secular and sacred, I mused upon the prospect of tickling up some of that goodly shoal on the morrow.

The river held grayling, not in any great numbers so low down, but still in fair quantities. It was, indeed, the promise of grayling fishing that had tempted me down, and during the afternoon's ride I saw several fish rising at the insects, of which a little red quill, with which my book was furnished, was a passable—I might even say colourable—imitation. In addition to salmon, roach, and grayling, there were heavy pike in the deeper portions of the river, so that although salmon were out of the question, there remained not a contemptible choice. With this thought I comforted myself after I had read a page or two of John Inglesant, extinguished my candle, and composed myself to such repose as one naturally looks for in a quiet well-ordered country parsonage.

On the whole perhaps I ought to be glad that next morning, in lifting my arm to shave, I felt an ugly twinge under the left shoulder. I knew it of old, and was aware that fly-fishing or spinning would be no pleasure for me that day. A feeling of bitter disappointment soured me for the moment nevertheless, for peeping out upon the lawn, I saw the white proofs everywhere of the first frost of the season. The sun was not fairly up, but I was not ignorant of the signs foretelling that lovely sunshiny day which often

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follows a November frost. Of course this was a grayling day to order, though not for me. In the breakfast parlour I had to confess that for the more vigorous practices of the art of angling I was simply *hors de combat*. Now, I admit this ordination was probably for the best. Three brace of grayling would have been the outside limit of my sport with the fly-rod, and if I could have used my single-hander without pain, I should no doubt have spent the whole of the day whipping, with perhaps an hour of spinning, after the fly had disappeared. As I will show presently, I did better than that.

Shirley invited me to throw a few night-lines into the pike lake as we went to the river, but I had not the materials, nor the inclination had the gear been forthcoming. At the point where I had seen the roach on the previous afternoon we descended from the pony-chaise, and the young gardener came up simultaneously with a supply of live gudgeon procured from a mill tail in the next village. As I determined to give the roach a fair trial—knowing that the fish were there, and were well worth catching—I fitted up my pike rod with live-gorge tackle. This I do not mention in any sense as an apology, having no sympathy with the affectation of any brethren who regard the process as of necessity unsportsmanlike. From a river that holds salmon, and grayling, and trout in the higher portions, I would not spare a pike of even six inches long. Besides, I had to spare myself somewhat, and was glad of the tackle that would do all the work for me. In, therefore, went my gudgeon below the swim where my pet roach were, or had been, and leaving my line and winch handle free, I cast a little ground-bait in.

“What humbugs you anglers are!” said Shirley.

“Humbugs, be hanged!” I replied. “What do you mean?”

"Only," he replied, "that when we get home I can show you one of your own printed articles, in which you most dogmatically say that pike fishing while white frost is about is a waste of time."

"Oh!" I answered, "there is no rule without an exception. The frost is gone pretty well after this sunshine, and I always try experiments for the sake of my own theories."

"Then," observed Shirley, who, as a sucking barrister, was bound to admit at least one of my pleas, "your experiment is worth more than your theory, for I'll be shot if your float isn't off, and your winch going round like mad."

True for him it was so. There was a smart run before I had wetted my roach line. But I was not to be baulked. I had plumbed my depth—a nice eight feet, with a hard bottom, upon which the plummet knocked encouragingly, and announced my intention of catching a roach before I did anything else. Still, when five minutes passed with no bite, I rather repented me of my rash vow. The pike rod winch was now quiet, and from the uneasy manner in which it had been dribbling out line after the first rush I fancied that the fish did not mean gorging. Perhaps for the sake of my theory I would rather lose the pike. Shirley Bray—a shrewd youth, like most parsons' sons who write for the papers and frequent Bohemian clubs—evidently had some such notion.

"Gad," he said, "I believe you want to allow the pike to escape on purpose to put me in the wrong. I'll go and land him myself."

"No, no," I said, striking sharply and playing a heavy fish in the roach swim.

The young gardener slipped the net under him, the first two-pound roach I had ever killed. This worthy was a Nottingham man. I could tell this from his remark.

“Two pounds and *about ten shot*, I think, sir,” he said.

This expression amused us a good deal, and we wasted the best part of ten minutes in testing the accuracy of the estimate. My pocket scales gave the pounds and half-pounds, but was not intended for shot weight. I got out of the difficulty by cutting up one of Shirley’s cartridges, and dropping the shots into the mouth of the roach, two at a time. The gardener was not far out, for the roach weighed eight shots (No. 4) more than two pounds. It was a pattern roach, even for a well-fed November fish. I suspect it was the patriarch of the shoal. I hoped so, too, as soon as I had got two more of about three-quarters of a pound each, because another of my theories—though I do not pretend to be an accomplished roach master—is that when the roach are “well on,” no member of the shoal will dare to pay you his respects until the leader has either taken or scorned the bait. This, however, is anticipating, and I must go back to the netting of the roach to explain that before the shot test was applied I winched in the pike tackle, and with it a nicely-marked, short, thick five-pounder, that had very conclusively discredited my dogma upon the white frost matter.

My young host and the gardener, after a quarter of an hour’s gossip, took their departure with gun and dogs, and just as I was playing another roach I heard the crack of his central fire amongst the blue-green patch of turnips, that looked so beautiful after the dusting of hoar it had received, on the slope of the upland.

Some few roach, though I would fain hope not many, I fear I lost after the first hour or two of angling by not attending to my business. In roach angling, more than in any other description of bottom fishing, it is essential that your eye should never be off your float. The bite is instantaneous, and the chance once lost does not recur

again that swim at any rate. There was a grayling, to begin with, that, about five yards out, kept rising. The water there must have been over three yards deep, but at intervals up would come this fish at any passing insect, which I noticed was some small, midge-like creature that I could not detect in the air along with the ordinary flies making merry in the sunshine. I saw the fish two or three times very distinctly, being perched somewhat above the level of the stream, and he was a good pounder. Naturally, as often as the little ring appeared I thought of my fly rod, and the cocktails, red tags, and quills, which I had prepared expressly for the expedition.

Then my thoughts were perpetually diverted by the falling of the leaves. What made this very common operation of nature unusual was the fact that not a zephyr was stirring. Literally, there was not a breath of air, and all water out of the current was like a mirror. But the frost had touched these leaves, and released them from further allegiance to the parent tree. So they kept scattering down without a sigh to impart direction to their wings. Twice a wild-pigeon came over from the opposite woods, settling in a beech whose outer branches were over my head, and the moment it settled in the branches down came a shower of ruddy messengers around me. Despite of these distractions there were not many swims that did not give me a fish. It was a superb bit of roach fishing. No fish would have been under half a pound, and there were a few of twice that weight. The average would be three-quarters of a pound. Fishing fine as I was doing, though not with a tight line, which the absence of wind enabled me to dispense with, I was in short driven to use the landing-net on each occasion.

The pike rod remained inactive down below for two or three hours. What else could you expect? On a still day

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above all others the angler must cover as much ground as he can, and find his fish. A river is different from a lake, because the stream takes your bait to a certain spot, and there leaves it, rendering it necessary for you to keep on the move if you would have sport. About three o'clock in the afternoon there were no more rises of grayling, and the roach gradually ceased to bite. By that time, moreover, I was satisfied. My twenty-three pound creel was crammed, and a little heap of bronzed beauties lay behind upon the moss with the pile taken during the first quarter of an hour. Honour was satisfied, content realized, and it was, therefore, easy to leave off, put up the roach rod, and rise from the square piece of cork which had been protecting me from the damp.

A quarter of a mile of comparatively clear bank on a serpentine portion of the river tempted me to go in for a bit of systematic pike fishing as a conclusion to my one day's sport. The western heavens already began to assume a colour which in the country you invariably associate with frost. Two or three herons sailed overhead on their journey home to the herony, at least ten miles away. The smoke from a woodman's cottage over the way ascended straight and blue, and the woodman's axe I could hear in the forest, ringing as it only does when there is frost in the air. The scene was unusually wintry for such an early date in November, and the hips and haws, the bare trees, the holly berries, and the nipping air seemed to accentuate the first frost to a degree which struck me much. After London streets it was coming into a Christmas atmosphere even before the so-called Christmas annuals were published: and sarcasm could no further go than that.

There used in my school-days to be eight furlongs to one mile. That makes two furlongs to every quarter, and, therefore, according to Cocker, I got with my live gudgeon

a brace of jack to each furlong. They were all of a size, however—about five pounds—and it was clear that the ten and twelve pounders of which there are too many in the river were not moving. So far my white frost theory was saved, although, had there been as much wind as there was calm, I think something better would have been done. Shirley Bray put in an appearance just as I took up the rod to winch in my last pike, and stood by while I netted it.

Was I satisfied? That was the question he first asked. Before I could reply, he inquired whether I had enjoyed my lunch. The little flat basket with the customary furniture remained, however, untouched. I had never thought of lunch. Then my friend asked me for a cigarette, as he had done on our drive out from the rectory in the morning, and amazed he was to find how many had been extracted from my case during the day. These little matters coming to my notice, I knew what a glorious day had been mine, and it will be some time before I forget the first frost which came under my personal notice in that year of grace.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## A GRAYLING EXPEDITION.

IF you were invited to name your own terms in the matter of weather for grayling fishing during the month of November, you would probably bargain for a few nights of frost, succeeded by sunshiny days, and water of moderate height and reasonable clearness. Under these circumstances you would know that there would be some sorts of fly dancing through their transitory existence. The frost would have loosened what leaves had remained after the wet and wind of late October, you would not be troubled by weeds, and you would, in short, have favourable conditions for the pursuit of your favourite autumn fish.

As a matter of fact these were the conditions under which I recently travelled down the line in hopes of a little grayling fishing, and perhaps a pike or two, in certain waters not far from the ancient city of Sarum. A week previous to my start there had been something in the nature of floods, but a worthy friend at Salisbury passed me on the word, per penny post, that the colour had gone out of the water and the river run down to an encouraging level. I went to visit his studio on the Friday evening, and, whilst looking at a most telling picture describing the capture of a large perch which had indiscreetly taken a live minnow, he said that there was every prospect of a day's sport on the morrow. After this assurance there was a little time left for the con-

tents of the studio. Friend Targett escorted me through his garden on my way to the inn, and we wistfully discussed the appearance of the heavens. It was a bright, moonlight night, with white fleeces of clouds moving up slightly from the south-west; but when I deigned to express my approval of the clearness of the sky around the moon, my companion looked to windward and shook his wise head, pointing out a low-lying bank of leaden colour, half hidden by a veil of mist. From this he prophesied that we should probably have a stormy day for our operations.

On Saturday morning we moved first of all to a ford near a tiny church, which I had the opportunity of entering the next day, to find that it was just large enough to seat forty-six persons. These particulars are impressed upon me now, because as we turned out of the high road and descended into the valley in which the little church lies, my companion told me of its connection with the memory of George Herbert. With anything but a pleasant feeling I recalled the written words of the old divine :

Sweet day ! so cool, so calm, so bright !

These lines I really repeated with bitterness, because although the day was cool, and at that particular moment calm, it was not by any means sweet and bright. A drizzling rain fell, and before we got to the waterside the moisture was streaming off our waterproofs, and we were both of us beginning to experience that sinking of the heart which the prospect of a bad day by the riverside will inflict upon the most enthusiastic sportsman. But of course we went to work, and at the ford were a little encouraged by observing that several grayling were rising with that steady, persevering, yet decided movement which shows them to be feeding. The river here broadens out and runs over golden sands, and within easy casting distance there were two or

three streams, in the eye of which the fish appeared. Our plan was to put up here both spinning and fly tackle, because, as we moved up the stream, we should continually pass deep reaches of the river where pike lay. This work accomplished, I found myself first with the fly rod, and, having set up a new pair of waders for the excursion, was very soon knee-deep, despatching a small red quill gnat, which I rather fancied, across the stream. There was one false rise, which extracted a note of hope and comfort from Mr. T., who had just finished his preparations on the bank, and was kindly waiting until I had taken the cream off the opportunities. But, before I had arrived at my fourth cast, an exclamation of another character came from him. This was caused by his keen eye detecting an increasing colour in the water, and forthwith he told me that I might as well come out and move on ; there would be no more fishing at this place until the afternoon. He knew the habits of the country, and that some distance up a number of hatches, which relieved the stream from the park, had been opened.

At this time of the year the descending rubbish is of a varied and annoying character, dead leaves and branches of trees being intermingled with the other refuse which accumulates along the line of hatches. This was a bad beginning, and very disappointing. Nevertheless it had to be endured, and we trudged along the road to strike the river about a quarter of a mile beyond the old-fashioned village, under the park walls. The rain had still kept on at a steady drizzle, but, as we marched over the decaying leaves under the avenue of elms, the sun seemed to make an attempt to peep out, and we thought that all might yet be fair. We were able indeed, the rain ceasing, to take off our heavy waterproofs, and resume sport at a certain bend in the river with something like comfort. At about the third cast, on a shelving shallow, I was soon fast into a pound

grayling, whose purple spots and comely proportions we duly admired before placing him in the basket. A little time afterwards I hooked another fish, and this turned out to be a trout, to be returned as a matter of course, though it was really in good condition.

Then the rain came on again with more determination than before, and the wind began to bluster keen and shrill. It rose in gusts, which in the course of half an hour became almost shrieks, and we were forced to leave off and look round at the wild appearance of the sky. It rained harder and harder. A herd of shorthorns that had been previously feeding about the meadow concentrated in a body as far as they could from the wind, which brought them pretty close to the river bank, and there they huddled together with their sterns towards the west, from which the blast howled in increasing force. Mr. T. and the man in attendance retired by-and-by to the shelter of a couple of large elm-trees, about thirty yards from the point at which I had been informed lay some of the best grayling in the river. I believe, as I stood there struggling hard to get my fly across the water, my friend was endeavouring at the top of his voice to carry on a conversation with me, but I neither heard nor heeded him. The gale at last, however, was so violent that I could not bring my rod into an upright position, and as for getting a fly upon the water it was a clear impossibility. All, therefore, beat a retreat to the upper part of the meadow, and, while crouching under the park wall, that remarkable storm culminated which was graphically described in the morning papers of the following Monday.

Branches flew across country from all directions; the oldest trees seemed to creak and bend; the rain came down absolutely in sheets; the roaring of the wind deafened us; and when, by-and-by, red lightning flashed in our eyes

and thunder crashed immediately over our heads, followed by pelting volleys of hail, we looked at each other in sheer astonishment. It was the most remarkable storm of the many storms that I had seen ; nor was I surprised afterwards to see it described in this paper as a tornado, in that as a whirlwind, and to read that in Portsmouth and parts of Dorsetshire and Somersetshire people had been frightened into a suspicion that the last day was at hand. The novelty of even such a storm as this, however, wore away ; but, as sport was hopeless, we went to the neat little cottage of the village blacksmith, to which our luncheon had been sent, and tried to console ourselves into the belief that we were having an extremely jolly day. Yet it was almost a certainty that the drainage from the roads would discolour the water.

The river runs down a valley of many miles in length, parallel with the road, which, to make matters worse, is upon a chalky formation. After the storm the sky cleared, and the sun actually shone ; but little were we prepared for the additional foot of water which that hour and a half of tempest had brought, and the milky matter with which the stream was thickened. It was as muddy as a river could possibly be, and although we walked along, putting up at one bend sixteen wild duck and flushing lots of snipe, and for form's sake sullenly throwing a fly upon a turbulent current, we went home, the total result of our day's sport being the pound grayling which lay in my basket and the trout which had been returned.

Fortune had some small amends in store for the succeeding Monday. The river had run down fairly well, and we drove a few miles higher up, and took courage at the gleams of sunshine that struggled with the clouds, and at the honest hue of the stream. Probably that philosopher was right who argued that the great charm of angling lies in the boundless exercise it offers to the faculty of Hope. Very

often it is the only exercise it does offer. My artist comrade, like a good fellow, gave me the pick of the water, and we worked hard, trying the grayling reaches with fly, and the deeps with artificial spinning baits. But an hour or two convinced us that, though we might escape a positive blank, we should make no phenomenal baskets. The air was still shrewish, blowing bleak from the uplands, where the rooks and starlings were congregated in prodigious numbers, rising apparently at some signal, in dense clouds, and wheeling in airy movement, acting upon some settled order of the day ; then, after a few graceful manœuvres, alighting once more in a body to blacken a space of at least a couple of acres. In sheer gratitude to this remarkable congregation, I hereby give them a free advertisement, for they afforded me much entertainment.

At a ford, which was the ideal of grayling water, I contrived to basket four grayling of about the regulation inches, and to hook a brace or so of under-sized fish. The floating fly they would have none of, confirming once more an old impression of mine, that anglers waste a good deal of time occasionally in dry-fly fishing for grayling. A small Yorkshire hackle, that I think is termed a golden palmer on the Wharfe, was the thing they fancied best, and after a while the heavy fish began to move. Then I must needs hook a two-pound trout which rushed up stream after the fly, and that intruder consumed five minutes of most valuable time. When the large grayling at this time of the year do take it into their heads to rise, pray remember the motto of your copy-book, " Make hay while the sun shines."

The big trout not a little interfered with my prospects, therefore, by his strength and persistency ; forbidding me to be too bold with my gossamer cast, by his lively excursions into the very choicest water, and lastly, by his usurping the position which a more seasonable fish might have occupied.

Then I lengthened out line bit by bit until the hook was hung up in an oak a score of yards in my rear, necessitating more troubling of the water as I retreated to shore to recover it.

But all things come—as it is the fashion to say—to him who waits. After a proper interval, having waded out to my old position, and tranquillity reigning again, I somehow missed fish after fish—not the smaller fellows that seemed to swarm there, but the heavy ones that plucked at you boldly. To account for this misfortune, I thought of every reason but that which should have at once occurred to a much younger angler than myself. There was no necessity for changing the fly, because the grayling rose so well at it, that once, twice, and thrice I *felt* the tug. The experienced reader, of course, knows what a dolt I was. The hook point of my pretty little golden Palmer had been left hard and fast in the oaken tree, and the grayling had been meanwhile having rare sport with my dummy hook. The next pattern I selected from the fly-book was a Wickham—always a useful fly for any water and at any time of the year, and for any of the fish that sport at flies. The rise was now over, however, and I departed from the ford, conscious that I had worn out my welcome. The feathered multitudes in the uplands yonder, I fancy, knew all about my blundering and defeat, since they seemed to indulge in wider movements and more elaborate circlings in my direction.

My companion meanwhile had picked up a grayling here and there, and had at intervals brought his pike-line into free play. For this rougher work he never uses a rod, but in his bag, on all his fly-fishing expeditions, you will find a pike-line neatly affixed to a winder, and with tracing and flights ready for use. Arrived at a promising place, he spikes the rod, unwinds his pike-line, keeping the coils in

his left hand, and with his right makes really good casts to distances up to thirty yards and over, spinning the bait towards him hand over hand, and dealing summarily with any fish that may happen to make acquaintance with the hooks. The pike were not moving on this occasion, or, at any rate, they did not move at our artificial gudgeon.

At the lower portion of our day's limit we had a choice of several streams that promised grayling—one especially that, after the rough tumble of a pool fed by a hatch, glided softly under the opposite bank. Here I killed a good grayling in just that workmanlike manner that you have a perfect right to boast about. That is to say, there was no element of luck in the proceeding. You make up your mind, after a deliberate survey of the position, that just two inches from the overhanging bough of the leafless guelder-rose there must lie a respectable fish ; that the fly must be pitched lightly about six inches above the glassy head of the glide ; and that, when hit, the fish must be kept carefully in hand, so as not to alarm the others who might reasonably be supposed to be under the lee of the pigsty in the cottager's garden. The fish in this particular case was there ; the attractive Wickham alighted gently and precisely upon the desired spot ; the grayling rose in the orthodox way, and was neatly struck, played, and landed, though I say it that should not. Truth to tell, the artist who was looking on said the same. It was a grand grayling, too.

There was no getting below, or coaxing him down with the current ; the position demanded that I should work him up to my feet against stream. When a strong grayling is considerably below you in a swift water, and puts up that big handsome back fin, rolling and floundering at every chance, you are never sure of him until he is actually in the net. Another brace of moderate-sized fish rewarded us, and by

three o'clock, as the sun had gone and the cold had sharpened, we departed townwards.

Seven or eight brace of grayling are not a very extraordinary result of a long journey, and the expenditure of time and money; but I had the consolation, undoubtedly, of being assured by a brother angler, whom I met a day or two after my return, that the last time he had fished the self-same water he killed two-and-thirty brace, including several two-pounders. It is, at any rate, something to know that everybody is not so unlucky as yourself. But I was able to overturn that brother angler's oft-avowed theory that the grayling never leaps out of water when hooked. Twice within an hour, fish of about three-quarters of a pound—the minimum weight allowed to be taken in the water—sprang clean out when struck.

## CHAPTER XIV.

## THE OLD SPOT REVISITED.

IN hopes that the blustering westerly gales which had been tumbling down chimneys and strewing our coasts with wreck had, ashamed of their violence, blown themselves out during their three days' raging across the country, yet in fear lest the heavy rains of two out of those three days were still unabsorbed by the overcharged land, we set out, a friend and myself, for a brief spell of fishing. The interest of the visit was a double one to me, because the water to which we were bound was that in which I had caught my first good pike.

The old spot, after all, had little changed during the long period—not much short of a score of years—which had elapsed since I had last seen it. The canal—in whose locks I had had many an hour's sport with dace caught from the rough, tumbling water, and at one of which I had once been discovered by lady friends half faint and ghastly pale, slowly recovering from the despair of losing a grayling—alone showed the march of improvement in this part of the country. The canal, after serving as a means of communication in pre-railway days, and as a reservoir feeder afterwards, had outlasted the purposes of its creators and adapters. The lock-gates had rusted and rotted to pieces, and the famous tumbling pool, which I could remember once boiling with fury, flecked with bubbling foam, and rich

in its stores of dace, grayling, and an occasional trout, had been ignominiously filled up with the refuse of years. But here, with the identical background of alders, was the very bank of rushes outside of which, spinning with a home-made artificial bait of gutta-percha coated with gilt foil, I had struck the triangles into the first really heavy pike memory could call its own. Here was the familiar wooden bridge of the inn spanning the river, somewhat after the structure we see upon the willow-pattern plates, and from whose summit we were wont to watch for salmon ascending to the upper spawning-grounds. It seemed quite like old times to have the conversation turning upon the salmon pool beyond the stone bridge, and to be informed that the salmon had just finished going down. Seeing the interest I took in the subject the old gentleman took me round the meadow, and showed me under the outspread boughs of the weeping willow a couple of miniature mountain ranges thrown up in the gravel bed of the stream by two fine salmon (the male being a twenty-pounder), which had just completed the duties of propagation.

There was still a margin of turf separating the river from the garden, except at the western end, where it was separated from the meadow by a fringe of alders and a ditch. This half-acre of black mould was surrounded by water—the river in front, and a deep backwater bending round to the back, where the level mead was intersected with runnels of all sizes, and only to be travelled over by one possessing a knowledge of the many planks and rustic foot-bridges. Familiar, indeed, was this backwater, neither narrower nor shallower than of yore, from which stray pike, perch, and eels many a time and oft were transferred to my hungry creel ; the little brook where you could always make sure of finding a plentiful supply of caddis bait ; the water-cress bed, from which the cresses had long been grubbed,

so that it might be used as a sort of loose-box for live bait. These were precisely as they used to be. The very celery trenches and winter kail in the garden seemed never to have altered by so much as a leaf or stalk, though it was somewhat unusual in the month of January to find, along the borders, everlasting daisies in blossom and wallflowers in bud.

Eager anglers, however, arriving at a well-known water-side, overjoyed to find the river which they had expected to see the colour of road-puddles in fishable condition, and delighted at the sunshine so long withheld, spend brief time in sentimental reflections—spend brief time indeed at even more prosaic occupations. We had, therefore, hurried through our luncheon in the parlour overlooking the quoit-ground, and had hastened forth to see what we could do in the two or three hours remaining of the short winter day. My companion prides himself upon being a roach fisherman, equalled by few, excelled by none. He is the most roach-wise of mortals. Although, therefore, pike awaited him, although perhaps even nobler game might fall to his share, he must needs put together his roach-rod, and produce a fustian bag of small dung-hill worms ("cockspurs," he grandiloquently dubbed them), and try the eddy at the bottom of the garden, which I had assured him had never in the old days failed to yield something worth taking.

On my part, I resolved to stoop to nothing meaner than voracious pike. Equipped in different fashions, we thus separated for a while. There was a good deal too much water as I soon perceived for both of us, and I knew too well that in these swift-running streams, although the water may be clear, when the volume is excessive the fish are very shy and difficult to get at. As a matter of fact our hopes were not realized. Evening was approaching, and

we had to confess that we had done nothing. I had spun in the most likely water, and fancied that once I saw a salmon follow the bait. On the whole I should have been pleased had he taken it, seeing that he could have been returned again to learn better manners by his annual trip down the Solent.

It was, for pike, a bad look-out. I had not the semblance of a run, nor had I seen a fish move. My friend, with all his magnificent arts and unanswerable theories, had fished carefully and patiently, but neither roach, nor perch, nor dace had gratified his expectant eyes. For myself I gave up the game, and depositing my rod and still undamaged spinning-bait upon a carpenter's bench conveniently placed, as if for the purpose, at the back of the little inn, I went across the Chinese bridge, and strolled on, to take a lesson or two from the roach-master, as he stood, a little blue with cold, but still with a fine frenzy in his eye, in the shelter of the alder, the purple tips of whose branches I noticed were just beginning to show like the velvet bloom of a plum. There, was a nimble willow-wren, too, hopping about in the bushes.

Half an hour spent in watching an angler, however expert, who catches nothing, and who by the utmost stretch of persuasion could not induce me to believe that the dragging of his red worm upon the bottom meant a bite, was, as you must confess, not exactly a lively proceeding. It was getting bitterly cold, moreover, without the sun, and the wind was rising. I therefore took a turn back again, across the bridge, and made for the house, when, happening to look round, I saw my friend in an attitude that one might recommend as requiring the investment of no artistic merit, evidently fast in a fish. It was something heavy, too, for his limber rod was bent like the traditional whip, and a native, who stood by, was dancing about on the parsley-bed in wild excitement. "Bring the net,"

shouted my friend. Being an expert, and, as he had explained to me during the whole journey down, a particularly accomplished angler, he had naturally left that necessary implement on the sofa of our sitting-room. Thence I fetched it with all speed, convinced in my own mind that the chances were very much in favour of my friend having by accident managed to hook one of the veteran grayling that always lie about on the edges of the stream.

And, sure enough, so it turned out to be. I must do him the justice to say that the angler admirably met the emergency, having the finest roach tackle it was possible to use, a delicate line, and a fish, the tenderness of whose mouth is notorious to all who have ever had dealings with *Salmo thymallus*. The bite had been a feeble one, the float slanting slowly away, and scarcely taking trouble to disappear beneath the surface, but a very gentle strike settled the business of the fish, and, after a sharp run of a couple of yards, he was humoured and coaxed, and allowed to throw himself about in the pliant and graceful attitudes, which a grayling, as much as any of his tribe, assumes.

By the time I arrived on the scene with the landing-net the fish had well-nigh closed his career, and, after a few faint gyrations on the top of the water, I succeeded in netting a noble grayling. It had not been at all firmly hooked, and nothing but skilful manipulation could have saved the prize. We were eager to decide there and then as to the weight of the fish, and I was not astonished, after my other experiences of the day, to find that my accomplished friend, who was specially proud of never forgetting anything it was necessary to remember, had left his weighing-scales also on the sitting-room sofa. This machine I brought with due ceremony, and, in the presence of an admiring audience of three or four gentlemen who had rushed out of the inn on

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hearing of the excitement at the riverside, the game was carefully weighed, and found to be within half an ounce of two pounds.

Inspirited by this success, my friend put on a fresh worm and tried again, but darkness closed in quickly, and we willingly transferred our united energies to the pleasureable business of food and fire at our rustic hotel. Then a pleasant chat on fishing topics over the fire, and so to bed, with hopeful anticipations of early rising and good sport on the morrow. The wind howled dismally, shrieked in the tree-tops without, shook the casement, and attacked the candle by whose light I tried to read myself to sleep. Then the rain pattered on the pane, driven by the sharpest gusts like small shot upon the glass. Here was a draft upon our balance of resignation. If this continued through the night our last opportunity was gone. It did continue through the night, and when in the morning I looked out of the window, it was blowing and raining as if another deluge were upon us. The ditch which ran parallel with the road was brimming over with dark yellow liquid. From another window I saw the river, at least a foot higher than it was twelve hours previously. And I returned sadly to bed.

Not, however, to sleep. Under such circumstances, if you are made of the stuff that goes to the formation of a real sportsman, your conscience will not let you slumber. It whispers to you that if you are a man you will dare all rather than skulk moping between the sheets, afraid to face the angry elements. It will remind you that in all the poems, novels, and leading articles you have ever read, the hardiness of the sportsman was always thrust prominently forward. Nay, it will recall the Biblical account of one of the earliest fraternity (albeit, there is no record of his being a fisherman), and how Esau was so much out of doors that he literally stank of the field. Thus pondered I, tossing

from side to side as the casement rattled, and the storm raged without, making fearful uproar in the bending elms, one of which—a notable old fellow, wrinkled and hoary—had succumbed since the previous evening. It was scarce more than twilight at ten o'clock, but there might be a chance after all, and so, with high resolve, I arose, and determined to make one big effort not to return empty-handed. My excellent friend, sounded on his pillow, was willing also to sacrifice himself, being, in fact, as game as was his yesterday's grayling.

We passed over the bridge into the well-ordered mill-yard. The main stream passed through hatches just above, and to our delight we found the tumbling bay, and the short length between the mill and the road, in tolerable condition. My friend, acting on my fatherly advice, put on a live bait, and, under the shelter of the office wall, by which the stream washes with an accuracy which the clerks, no doubt, emulate, and with a deep hole under overspreading boughs opposite, I essayed my first cast with a Chapman spinner, affixed by numbed fingers to a Thames dace. How often we make a mistake over that first cast ! Wet and cold already, we were not begining hopefully, and I confess to throwing the bait across, and a little down stream without thought of doing more than satisfying myself that the bait would spin. Snap, however, from under the very wall on whose edge I stood, came a fish.

“I have him,” I shouted, in exuberant baritone. Alas ! the words ought to have been, “I have thee, I have thee not.” The fish had, as a cruel matter of fact, got off, for I had, in my carelessness, overspun it, and the bait returned to my hands cut clean in twain just below the last triangle. But that fish was perfectly safe, I was satisfied of that. Even if it had been pricked, which it had not been, its mood was such that it would have come again. About the

fourth cast I found him once more, on the ground upon which he had dropped, ten yards below. This time I took care to retain him beyond hope of remedy—a well-fed fellow, weighed on the spot, and basketed as an honest five-pounder.

Strangely impressionable creatures are we. This morsel of encouragement acted like magic upon both of us. We laughed at the stinging rain, which was searching out all the undefended points and drenching us heartily, and hailed the wind as our best friend. In the latter conclusion we were, of course, logical. If pike will not run in a 'south-west wind, they may be given up as incorrigible. Glistening with wet, we tried the tumbling bay, and essayed a cast or two in the much too high river in the meadow above the mill, but, no response forthcoming, we resolved to move across to the aforesaid backwater, while it was yet day.

In gales of wind and rain from the south-west, when they have been blowing hard all night, you get into the habit of expecting a break either at twelve or three o'clock. Why this tradition has arisen, and why we learn it and trust it, I know not, but for many years it has been one of my cherished beliefs. Noon, however, brought us worse instead of better weather. By this time we had, as it were, impinged upon the commencement of the pike reach in the backwater, a narrow, winding, sedge-fringed length, quite deep enough to entice a pike to harbour there when the main stream was running with abnormal swiftness. We could scarcely hear ourselves as we hallooed to each other at point-blank distance. The waves in the little by-stream were dancing high, but, luckily, the wind was across the current, and, therefore, in my favour. In the first half-hour I landed a brace of small fish, bordering on two pounds, and, as I supposed, to be returned—a piece of chivalry for which

the keeper, when by-and-by I informed him of the circumstance, did not pretend to thank me.

Better luck came presently, not in large, but in two or three takeable fish—takeable here, meaning two pounds and a half or thereabouts, and not four pounds, as in regular jack preserves. Then I lost a good fish in turning round to discover the whereabouts of the gaff. Ill-luck ordained that, at the moment of turning, the blast should suddenly catch the rod, and cause the line to slacken, so that before I could recover command of the implement the fish had freed itself, being no doubt lightly held by one, instead of three hooks.

A few yards below I struck a better fish, though he was tame for his size, and stalwart, solid of proportion. He remained, as hit, in mid-stream, amongst the waves, shaking his head fretfully and dolorously, but not attempting to run. One of the advantages of a narrow bit of water with high banks is that you can often watch the behaviour of your friend at the end of the line. This I was able to do, and was accordingly in no particular hurry, being convinced that he was as soundly hooked as could be desired.

“What’s this?” the fish seemed to be murmuring. “This is curious. It must be the wind that has got into my mouth. I’ll blow it out.”

To effect this purpose he floated lightly to the surface, and a very pretty spectacle it was, to see the head and shoulders and the tail-end submerged, while a portion of the middle was clear above the hollow of the waves. The dorsal fin, with its pretty markings and the bright olive of the side, showed well by contrast with the dark, agitated water. Never before, I suspect, had this particular fish been in such a novel position. Whales, occasionally, amongst the ocean rollers, are partly submerged and partly out of water, but pike seldom. The unseemliness

of the business at length appeared to penetrate what there was of intellect in the fish. He shook his head in temper very different from the dilettanti wagglings that followed the mysterious check upon his dash at the bait. His angry passions rose, while he himself fell into the depths. Like a penitent bound for a retreat, he withdrew himself from the world. Yet he never ran far. Not a yard of line went out. I had nothing to do but keep the point of the rod up and the line moderately taut, careful, after previous experiences, to turn my back to the gale (it was a hurricane now), and manœuvre so that the wind should not take a mean advantage of the line. I gave that fish several chances of bolting, in order that my trusty mate, who stood by with the gaff, and who did not pretend to have had much experience with pike, might note that the exciting accounts he had read of battles with ferocious fish were true to nature, and not the pumped-up fancies of piscatorial fictionists. The fish was apparently determined to frustrate this beneficent purpose. Time after time the pike allowed himself to be towed within gaffing distance.

I was, as the reader will perceive, placed in an awkward predicament. Here was, as the saying runs, a begging of the whole question. My pike would not be a hero, nor allow me to be one. On the contrary, he remained near the bank, as far as I could see, contemplatively studying the root formation of a commonplace bulrush. All that was left for me was to dissemble. This to my brother angler :—

“Why don’t you gaff the fish? Do you want me to lose it? Gaff it, I say.”

My unsuspicious friend humbly begged my pardon, and thrust the gaff into the belly of the pike with a decision that, projected into his routine business transactions, will make him a lord mayor long before the City Corporation

is disestablished and disendowed. The pike lay on the grass, merely flapping his tail, in dull protest, as the steel persuader was removed from his under parts. My friend, being a practical man, had his avoirdupois machine out in a twinkling, and wanted to "weigh in" before I had cut the triangles out. I never saw a better-hooked fish. Not content with absorbing the three triangles in the best holding portions of his jaws, he had mashed the bait, and speared himself with the sharp wire to which the lead of the Chapman arrangement is attached. This betokened a resolute heart up to that point, and explained perhaps why such a determined customer at last threw up the sponge without a tussle.

At three o'clock the prophesied break in the weather no more appeared than at noon. Innate politeness kept my friend in royal attendance, but he was damp and shivering, and undoubtedly oppressed with the consciousness that the fun was all on one side, and that not his own. We had ere this worked down to the backwater mouth, which was, and is, and always has been, the best place for pike ; but it for once failed. The fine temper and gentle perceptions of my friend may be read in the remark he made at this stage of the business.

"I'm ready when you are," he said, as if casually ; bad luck to my selfishness.

The campaign came to an end there and then. I winched up, and we floundered back through the water-meads, collecting the rush-basket here, and the bait-can there ; and with the said rush-basket slung between us upon our united rods, we returned to quarters. The doctor was there, the keeper and his assistant were there, the landlord was at hand, and the comely daughter hovered around, all looking at each other and at us. Had we committed a crime ? Was there a warrant out ? No. There had simply been a bit

upon the gross weight of my fish, and the person who had wagered that I should not bring home 15 lbs. of pike lost. I laid out my six fish upon the freestone flooring of the passage, and saw that the lot honoured 21 lbs., bar one little half-ounce. In such weather, and with the main river barred, this was satisfactory, if not sensational. The three undersized specimens which I had returned would have been at least 5 lbs. more.

## CHAPTER XV

## WINTER ANGLING.

It is only the man having within him the true heart of a sportsman who is addicted to the practice of winter angling. Him, storm does not affright, nor cold deter. The elements enter not into his consideration further than the degree to which they affect the fishable quality of the water. The poetical side of the occupation is for the time obscured. Nature is no longer smiling with the light and shadow of gracefully waving foliage ; the bright colour has gone from her cheeks, the music of the soft wind from her voice. The swallow no more hunts the bee ; there is no murmur of insects in the air. After the autumnal equinox the fair-weather angler lays aside his paraphernalia until the time when

The crocus in the shrewd March morn  
Thrusts up its saffron spear.

Or he may prolong his recess still further, dreading the strengthening cold which the proverb truly assigns to lengthening days. In the genial climate of such a county as Devonshire, he may be tempted forth on fine days to try the virtues of the March brown, but more likely he will content himself with overhauling his gear, and wait till he can exclaim,—

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'Tis the early April lark,  
Or the rooks with busy caw,  
Foraging for sticks and straw.  
Thou shalt at one glance behold  
The daisy and the marigold ;  
White-plumed lilies, and the first  
Hedge-grown primrose that hath burst.

But the winter angler, strong in faith as in constitution, and loving his sport the better for the tribulation through which he possesses it, is on the alert in November, eager in December, enthusiastic in January, and desperate in February with the energy natural to one who sees a quick-coming end to his opportunities.

The mild winter is not loved by the angler unless in its earlier months there has been a wholesome preparation of frost. When the December and January days are warm, and the southerly and westerly winds seem to promise an abundance of sport, the winter angler often meets with direst disappointment. He holds, with the rest of the brotherhood, that there is nothing like keen frost for putting the fish into a proper frame of mind, and experience certainly in the main would appear to be on his side.

Who cannot recall days when the moisture from his line froze in the rings of his rod ; when the hard snow crackled under his feet as he pursued his persevering way in search of pike or grayling, glowing cheerily all the while with the healthy glow which open-air exercise alone can give ? And who, so drawing upon his memory, has not the satisfaction of adding that he has sometimes found such winter angling, not only the most pleasant, but the most profitable ?

The pike-fisher, rightly enough, hails the winter as his especial privilege. The weeds have rotted, and, should there have been timely frost and flood, have been swept away with other *débris* accumulated during the summer. The fish, deprived of their cover, retire to the deep water, and may there be found when judiciously called upon.

They are in the finest condition in the depth of winter there is a golden burnishment about the vesture of a well-fed pike during December, January, and part of February, that is not seen in full development at any other period of the season. Moreover,—

The tyrants of the watery plain,

as Pope calls them, are now in possession of their full faculties, and when they do move, dash at you with a heartiness of soul beautiful to behold. They are able to concentrate their attention upon passing events better than when, in the spring, they push up between the confined embankments of a circumscribed brook, and engage in marrying and giving in marriage ; or when, in May and June, they engage furnished lodgings for the season in the bowers of some aquatic forest, where, amongst the lilies and lovely growths which only dwellers below the surface of the water can thoroughly appreciate, they can meanwhile keep an evil eye upon the unwary fry out for a frolic ; or, when in the heat of July and August, they must needs get nearer heaven, and bask in the sun in happy indolence. The subaqueous coppices have been lopped and taken away, and should any fragments have been overlooked, they are not an attraction but an offence ; and as to shallows in winter-time, the pike knows better than to suppose that the silversides which sport there at midsummer are now to be deluded into even so much as a temporary visit. To the deeps, therefore, will they resort, and the angler has, so long as they there remain, the advantage of a fair field, and only so much favour as depends upon his own skill.

The good old fashion of trolling with a gorge bait seems to be almost forgotten, and to be treated with scant respect by modern angling authorities. It is certainly the most unsportsmanlike form of pike-fishing ; and only to be countenanced in rivers where pike are to be kept down. I

must confess to a sneaking liking for this ancient system, which was belauded and practised long before spinning was thought of. In country districts your accomplished troller may still be found, but, on the Thames, trolling is so little understood that the term is indiscriminately applied to all methods of spinning. Habit, I suppose, has much to do with these preferences, and I may explain, in mitigation of sentence, that my introduction to the art of trolling was sufficiently pleasant to impress it upon my mind, and enlist for it the suffrages of fancy.

Next to the “Compleat Angler,” no work on fishing has ever given me so much delight as the little book by “yours in all Christian Services, Ro. Nobbes.” The edition which fell in my way was that of 1682, entitled, “The Compleat Troller, or the Art of Trolling. With a description of all the utensils, instruments, tackling, and materials requisite thereto ; with rules and directions how to use them. As also a brief account of most of the principal rivers in England. By a lover of the sport. *Trahit sua quemq. voluptas.*”

Nobbes was not, as many, spite of protests by several authors, still declare, the father of trolling, for he dedicates his book “to the Right Worshipful James Tryon, Esquire, of Bullwick, in Northamptonshire ; a favourer of this art ;” and acknowledges with quaint courtesy and simple gratitude that from this worthy he “borrowed sparks which have since kindled and increased into a flame.” Master Nobbes was a diffident man, as his address “to the ingenious reader” shows. He apologizes for his work, but withal, he stands up boldly for his beloved sport of angling, as to which he says, “Our simple art composes the soul to that quiet and serenity, which gives a man the fullest possession and fruition of himself and all his enjoyments.”

And again, “Though all these contentments and many

more, both for Health and Pleasure, as well to gratifie the Senses and delight the Mind, do arise from this Cheap, and as some call it, mean Melancholy art; I say though all these satisfactions do proceed from it, and it propounds pleasure at such an easie rate, yet I expect to meet with no other Entertainment in the publishing of it than neglect, if not scorn, contempt, and neglect."

With neither the one nor the other did I receive the wisdom of this philosophical pikemaster, but on the contrary, taking it to heart, with such improved tackle as the modern masters have provided, did I capture my first pike upon the principles he laid down. After the lapse of long years I can go through every phase of that achievement, from the catching of the gudgeon in the morning, to the clumsy cast of the bait across the mill-stream where, bending round by the willow bed, it became sober in its flow, laving, on the further side, a fringe of flags following the sinuosities of the bank. Was it entanglement in a weed that after a few attempts arrested the hand, and caused the heart to beat quickly? But weeds do not give double knocks at your line, and then slowly take it against the current up to a quiet corner; nor make the line tremble, even as trembled the hand that held the rod, fearing lest the operation should be checked, yet hoping that the gudgeon so unmistakably struck would be as unmistakably pouched. Had I not for my consolation and guidance, the directions of Master Nobbes?

"When," he says, "you have diverted yourself as long as you think good with the pleasure of a bite, and can guess by the running of the Pike what progress he hath made in his repaste, by his ranging about for more, you may then hook him with a small jerk, and so take your fill of your contented sport: for though we say of a Pike as of a Thief, give him Rope enough and he will hang himself, yet a fine

gentle stroak will do him no harm, but rather secure him and entangle him the faster. If he takes the Bait greedily at bottom and marches up Stream with it, or strikes across the River towards his hold, he will then probably lie still a little time, while he is Pouching, as you may feel him check and tug at it ; from which place if he goes quick, you may let him alone a little longer, for you may come to lose all for want of two or three minutes' forbearance ; if he hath lain still a while the second time and then runs with it, you may let him go with it still, if you have a desire to prolong the sport ; if not, you may draw your Line streight, and with your Pole give him an easie stroke, and so feel him by degrees, till you come to see him ; but if he makes much resistance, and is very furious, let him have Line enough, and give him his full swing : he will be very angry at first, till he is better pacified by losing of his strength."

Apology for so lengthy a quotation I do not presume to offer, for a generation, I fancy, has arisen which knows not Nobbes, and furthermore, the advice, in the main, may stand without correction, although the eminent troller worked with clumsier weapons than do we, and erred, as did Izaak Walton, in certain matters of Natural History, upon which knowledge in those days was not complete.

Spinning, it is not to be denied, is the highest branch of the art of pike-fishing, and no man can take honours in that art who is not master of all its forms, either with natural bait or the numerous and on the whole successful imitations which have been invented. There are, however, up and down rural England, as many anglers who troll from preference, and who stoutly contend that taking one month with another, and one river with another, they can show as satisfactory an account of pike killed as by the best spinner that could be mentioned.

Perhaps the chief reason for this preference will not

appeal to every one ; to wit, the comparative immunity from hard work given by trolling. The theory is that every sportsman should be an iron individual who invites hardship as a badge of his tribe, and accepts severe toil as a prime necessity of sport. The time, however, arrives when our glorification in these Spartan sentiments is apt to cool.

A harder day's work than that involved in a persevering spinning of a broad river, whose banks are more or less wooded, and whose margin is fringed with rushes, I cannot at the present moment recall. There must be no pause in the ingathering of the line if the regular motion of the bait, without which spinning is a delusion, is to be maintained, and the shoulders must be constantly engaged if the rod is to be manipulated in workmanlike style. Still, I grant, for my own part, better that than any form of winter fishing that necessitates a stationary angler. Trolling presents a happy medium between the stagnation of live-baiting and the liberal exertion of spinning, and this is why many regard it as a pleasant form of winter fishing.

With his dozen dead baits, packed snugly in a bed of sweet bran in a cardboard box ; with his roomy bag at back, and gaff slung underneath it ; booted to the knees, and safe against the rain, the angler may wander, not lazily, but still at leisure, along the river, enjoying the prolonged sensation peculiar to the orthodox run secured by working the bait towards the feet, on the approved principles of trolling.

The pauses incidental to gorging—and the more the merrier—afford a temporary and agreeable relaxation, during which all the senses are alive, so that the observant eye, brightened by the glow of expectancy, has time and inclination to wander over land and water, and take in impressions that cannot fail to be happily tempered.

Upon the pike itself, chief prize though it be of winter fishing, it is not now necessary to dwell at any length. The

fish has been written of by able pens from time immemorial. He got into English heraldry before any other fish. Edward I. fixed the price of a pike higher than that of a salmon, turbot, or cod. Chaucer put the *luce* in a stew, to point a very telling moral. It was a pike that Frederic the Second, "governor of the Universe," is said to have honoured by marking it in 1232. The fish has been thought meat fit for kings and archbishops. And it is worthy of note that, through all the centuries, probably more falsehoods have been invented about the pike than over all other freshwater fish combined. Touching this latter consideration, a few months ago there was a paragraph industriously "going the rounds," which really gives colour to the frequent accusation of romancing brought against the angler. The story is bold and circumstantial.

A sportsman, so it runs, not a dozen miles from town, strolled out one morning with his gun and shot a "bobtail blue rock" which had escaped from the dangers of a recent pigeon-match. The bird fell into the lake, and "the well-known shot was surprised to see an enormous jack of some twenty pounds draw the bird under water and disappear." The voracious pike undoubtedly has a weakness for such delicacies as moorhen or dabchick, and would not perhaps draw the line at a blue rock. Still, it was curious that the fish should have been so near the edge at that time of the year, and still more curious that the sportsman should have been able with such arithmetical nicety to gauge the weight.

However, the real curiosity was to come. The narrative goes on to state that a sow and litter were prowling along the margin in search of dead bait left by the previous day's pike fishermen, and that one of the porkers, stepping in to secure a floating roach, was seized "by an enormous pike, who dragged him out of his depth, where he was joined by another member of the finny species." Of course, for a

while it was pull pike, pull pig ; but the latter "being fat and one of W.'s own breeding," the brace of pike, unable to effect a successful gorge, came off worst in the transaction. The pig stuck in their throats almost as if it were an embodied lie, and "in this state they were both dragged ashore."

The size of these specimens of the fresh-water shark is not given ; but as the fish which bagged the pigeon was, just in passing, as it were, mentioned as being of some twenty pounds, and one of the pig-hunters was thought worthy of being described as enormous, the inference is that they were of phenomenal dimensions. The tragic group—a brace of gigantic pike, side by side, gagged by a pig, upon which their hungry jaws had immovably closed—has, let us hope, been preserved. It is a thousand pities that poor Frank Buckland is not alive to hand it down to posterity in imperishable casting. In its way it would be a curiosity, and a unique contribution to any natural history museum.

Even the little incident of a pig taking to the water at so early an age is not without its value, opening up as it does a possibility of swine being educated to supersede water-spaniel or retriever. The weak point of the story is the unhesitating estimate of the fish that escaped with the pigeon, and the silence observed with regard to the larger monsters that did not escape. With a small amount of corroboration, we have here a story that might be added to the well-known instances of the angling books, such, for example, as Gesner's pike which attacked a mule, or the 170-pounder which, according to a paragraph in a London newspaper in the middle of the last century, pulled a parish clerk into a pool and would have devoured him, but for his agility in swimming ashore.

The late W. Barry, whose charming essays on sport have been published, told me that he once heard an angling club

described as "a place where fishermen meet to tell lies." This, of course, was cruelly unkind, and even libellous. Far be it from me to suggest a doubt of the truth of the pike-and-pig fatality to which I have called attention. At the same time, it is not to be denied that, as it stands, the story is calculated to give the brethren of the angle a bad name, not so much perhaps because the general reader would be sceptical about the facts, as on account of a certain slovenliness and even barrenness in the matter of authentic data. At the same time, one might almost believe any story told of a pike; and there are few anglers who might not from their own experience make statements of actual occurrences which none would believe.

The entertaining author of "My Life as an Angler" relates a humorous instance of incredulity anent a pike story. At a country-house breakfast-table in Lincolnshire a discussion arose upon the merits of pike as an article of food, and no doubt the contempt natural amongst gentlemen used to salmon and trout-fishing was freely expressed. One of the party sallied forth during the day to reduce the question to the test of practical experience. The lake which promised success yielded nothing. The angler thereupon moved to a stream which he describes as clear as crystal and not more than a yard deep, and saw a pike of about eight or nine pounds in weight poising himself in mid-water. The bait (a dace) was "chucked" to him, and the fish at once took it. The angler does not explain what tackle he used, but, as he "promptly drew my friend ashore," we may assume it was something of a snap character.

Be that as it may, he "gently put him in again, on which he paddled off a short distance, wheeled round, and stationed himself much as at first. I threw the bait again; he seized it immediately, and this operation was repeated

some five or six times." It is not surprising that at the seventh or eighth trifling of this sort the pike became suspicious, and was killed the next time he seized the dace.

Nor is it astonishing, perhaps, to find the angler's account of the adventure politely discredited. "There was," he says, "a distinguished company to partake of him"—meaning the pike—"one peer, one bishop, two or three baronets, and many county notables. I told my tale as I have told it above: the company was far too dignified for anything like direct contradiction, but I heard two or three dry coughs, and another subject was introduced at once. Plainly, not a soul believed me. I have repeated the story since in many companies, but have no recollection of ever finding any Christian or Samaritan yield the slightest credence thereto. I once told it at an anglers' dinner of about twenty, assembled by my excellent old friend Teale, of Leeds, to meet Frank Buckland. On that celebrated occasion every man excelled his neighbour's fishing anecdotes with some yet wilder tale, but the above simple story was rejected by all as a cram entirely beyond deglutition." There is no reason to doubt the story, nevertheless. A hungry pike is quite capable of all that is told by the narrator of this dreadful instance of disbelief amongst the higher orders, even a bishop playing the *rôle* of Thomas Didymus.

Next to the pike must come the grayling as an object of regard to the winter fisher. The streams in which it is to be found, however, are comparatively few, and as the fish has a much more delicate nature than either the pike or any of the coarse fish which engage the attention of the bottom-fisher, grayling fishing is confined to a select number of anglers. The grayling is the only fish to be taken with a fly during mid-winter. It furnishes the nicest description of angling, and, of course, for table purposes it is

immeasurably superior to the pike. Very pretty sport, indeed, it is during the sunny mid-day hours of a December day, when the frost has whitened the ground, and made the air crisp, when the grass, out of the track of the sunbeams, sparkles as with diamond dust, and when the blue smoke ascends straight from the cottage chimney and curls delicately amongst the bare branches of the great tree which shelters it, to catch with a small fly and fine tackle half a dozen brace of pounders for the Christmas dinner. Just for two or three hours, though not an insect can be discovered on the wing, the grayling, in the slyly-gliding eye and tail of a stream, will rise boldly, even if, in the shade of the further bank, the frost still holds.

The scientific bottom-fisher is, of course, also in his glory in the winter months. He knows that roach and perch, and maybe dace and chub, are then in the best condition, and that the largest fish are most likely to be hooked. What he may lack in quantity he may fairly hope to gain in quality. Bottom-fishing in winter, however, is sport only for anglers of strong constitutions, and it is during the bitter weather, when the searching blasts penetrate the very marrow, and the monotonous float never goes beneath the surface, that the patience of the shivering fisherman has her perfect work. In the deep "swims" what of large roach there may be in the shoal will, under ordinary conditions, freely take the bait, and often a coarser bait than the angler dares attempt at any other period of the year may be employed. The perch will have donned his most superb colours, and will not hesitate to boldly appropriate the bait intended for the pike. After a flood, rare store of fish may be reckoned upon in the backwaters and eddies of a river inhabited by perch, and the sun that is unsavourable for other descriptions will not render timid this dashing trooper of the stream.

A day's perch-fishing seldom comes amiss to any sort of angler. It reminds the veteran of the mill-pool of his far-off schooldays, and the gleeful success through which, with rude appointments, he contracted a lasting love for the gentle art. It is like rabbit-shooting, in that the sportsman who has flown at the highest game the world can offer, to the last day of his life loves occasionally to come back to it.

One has a sneaking kindness too for the fish itself. Hear what a learned and reverend authority like the author of "Notes on Fish and Fishing" says: "He is both handsome and beautiful. His symmetry is perfection, and in this respect I hardly know a fish I admire more. He is resplendent with colour, both in harmony and contrast. The dark transverse bars zebra-wise stripping his pale-shaded green body, his beautifully arranged scales, the bright vermillion of his anal and caudal fins, the golden irides of his eyes, and his white belly, make a picture which perfectly fills the ichthyologically admiring eye." And indeed it is so. This lover-like language is not over-drawn.

The fine determined disposition of the perch, when he takes up particular quarters, and is inclined for business, I can illustrate by a recent anecdote. In a small country town, not to be named, the odour of pancakes proclaimed Shrove Tuesday; the green winter had made green fields in advance, and the rooks were uproarious over their domiciles in the tops of the leafless elms. The little river looked very tempting, and I strolled down to a favourite spot where a brother of the angle sat rod in hand. Some little time before, he had been fishing for roach in an eddy, and had been in angler's parlance "carried away." The one description of fish, it should be interpolated, which the river had been supposed for years to lack, was the perch.

But it occurred to my friend that he had to thank a perch

for a broken foot-line, and, by way of experiment, he rigged up stouter tackle, and put on his largest worm ; in a few moments a fine perch was fighting hard for liberty, with its dorsal fin, as usual, raised in defiance to the last. Then followed an extraordinary run of luck : In the course of three hours the angler had caught, without moving from his seat on the rustic bridge, eleven perch, all over a pound in weight.

Two days later another angler, accidentally hearing the news, and having access to the privileged water, hurried from town, and sat himself down on the identical seat, if haply one member of that once goodly shoal remained. He too was fortunate. To his lot fell five perch, the largest weighing two pounds and a quarter, and they were caught from the same spot in the eddy as before. The next evening the original discoverer of the rare fortune thought it worth while to try again, and he secured two other fish and lost two. It was at this juncture that I passed by on the other side of the river, surprised to learn from ocular demonstration that every member of that hapless flock had not been taken. The next morning, having a spare half-hour before the starting of the train, I resolved, in a forlornish-hope kind of spirit, to go through the form of perch-fishing on my own account from the now famous seat, and I soon had the pleasure of landing a fish of one pound twelve ounces, and two half-pounders ; and of returning to the water a tiny perchlet, lovely enough in shape and tinting for a breast-pin or brooch. The shoal had somehow wandered into the eddy, and, contracting a fatal love for their new home, had remained in possession until probably not a sizeable fish escaped.

But, with all its delights, winter angling comes to an end without poignant regret. Before the ripe summer fishing there is an interval of rest for the coarser fish, and trout and

salmon for those who can travel to seek them. The pike have respite till June, and should have respite till August. When next the bottom-fisher sallies forth he finds once more the bountiful picture of which we all dream even in the brightest days of the happiest winter:—

Summer glows warm on the meadows, the speedwell and goldcup and daisies  
Darken 'mid deepening masses of sorrel, and shadowy grasses  
Show the ripe hue to the farmer, and summon the scythe and the haymakers  
Down from the village; and now, even now, the air smells of the mowing,  
And the sharp song of the scythe whistles daily, from dawn till the gloaming.

## CHAPTER XVI.

## WEATHER WISDOM.

AMONGST the earliest maxims instilled into the mind of the youthful angler are certain rules concerning weather. Readers of old-world authors on sports of every description will at once recall the precise and quaint directions laid down, to be, like the laws of Mede and Persian, never altered. In the domain of fishing we need range no further along the bookshelf than the delightful series of foolscap quarto reprints for which we are indebted to the patient enterprise of the late Mr. Satchell. The ancient essay attributed to Dame Juliana Barnes treats upon this special branch of the general subject. Even in the paragraph (p. 19) upon "wat tyme of y<sup>e</sup> day is best to angleyng" it is stated, "And yf hyt be a colde westeling wynde and a darke lowryng day, than wiyl the fysche commonly bite all day." In the succeeding paragraph we are advised that "when the wynde blowethe softly, and yn somer seasen when hyt ys brennyng hote," it is good to angle, and then follows the sentence, "And yf the wynde (that) sesan haue any part of y<sup>e</sup> Oriente North, (the) wetur then ys good, and wen hyt ys a greyt wynde, when hyt ys snowyt, reynet, or haylyth, thonderyt, or lightneth, or also minyng hoiy (that) is not to angle."

But Master Leonard Mascall, who in 1590 produced a

very interesting book, consisting largely of boilings down from other writers, puts similar wisdom into these words:—

“Here ye shall vnderstand in what wether ye shall best angle as aforesaide in the darke louring day, when the winde bloweth southly from the south or west: in the summer season when the sunne is very hote, it is then naught to angle, but from September vnto Aprill, it is then good in a faire sunny day, the winde being then good: if it haue any part of the Orient or east, it is then naught to angle, for they will not byte, or when it is a great winde, snow, raine, or haile, or in a great tempest of thunder, or lightening, for it feareth them, or els in a swooly hote wether, all these times are not good to angle for to take fish.”

Next we come to John Dennys, Esquire, who told the “Secrets of Angling in Poetry” (much of it is quite deserving the name), in 1613, and who instructs his readers as to the best times and seasons in which to angle, as—

But if the weather stedfast be and cleare,  
Or ouercast with clouds, so it be dry,  
And that no signe nor token there appeare,  
Of threatening storm through all the empty skie,  
But that the ayre is clame and voide of feare  
Of ruffling windes or raging tempest hie,  
Or that with milde and gentle gale they blow,  
Then it is good unto the brooke to goe.

And then, after some rhyming remarks upon the clearing of a river after a flood, prettily described as the waters waxing “more thin and gray,” and the likening of the milder stream to the colour of whey, he commits himself to a definite opinion in favour of a south or south-by-west wind. I cannot forbear quoting the two succeeding stanzas as specimens of J. D.’s poetic quality:—

When faire Aurora rising early shewes,  
Her blushing face beyond the Easterne hils,  
And dyes the heauenly vault with purple rewes,  
That far abroad the world with brightnes fils,

The meadowes greene are hoare with siluer dewes,  
That on the earth the sable night distills,  
And chanting birds with merry notes bewray,  
The neere approaching of the chearefull day.

Then let him goe to riuier, brooke, or lake,  
That loues the sport, where store of fish abound,  
And through the pleasant fields his iourney make,  
Amid'st sweet pastures, meadowes fresh and sound,  
Where he may best his choice of pastime take,  
While swift Hyperion runnes his circle round ;  
And as the place shall to his liking proue,  
There still remaine or further else remoue.

There is a quaint practical little treatise, “The Anglers’ Museum,” which ran into three editions. The author was Thomas Shirley, and the first edition was published by John Fielding in 1784. “Bibliotheca Piscatoria” does not suggest a date for the publication of the second and third, for the obvious reason that in those editions the name of the author and date have disappeared. In my copy, however, of the third edition, the owner has written his name, with the date 1787 underneath. Shirley, too, I notice, uses the phrase “whey-colour” with respect to fining water. Amongst a multitude of thoroughly practical hints, he enumerates as proper times for angling—calm weather; a brisk south or west breeze (and if you can find shelter no matter how high it be); and cool and cloudy days of the hottest months. The improper times are—in a strong east or cold north wind; after a long drought; when there has been a white frost in the morning; in days of high wind; upon the rising of any sudden clouds that are likely to precede rain; the days following dark clouded or windy nights.

Coming down to the early years of the present century, we find that the result of “many years’ practice, experience, and observation,” induces T. F. Salter, gent. (“The Anglers’ Guide”), to warn anglers not to expect sport with heavy rain or hail, especially if accompanied by a tempest or

hurricane, or a very cold and strong east or north wind. Thunder, lightning, and hail are offensive to fish, he says, and he clinches his wisdom in the homely quatrain :—

When east wind blows or sun shines bright,  
Then don't expect the fish will bite.  
If ask'd, "What wind suits angling best?"  
I answer, "The south or south-west."

All these opinions are put in an equally homely form in the very familiar rhyming proverb from which we learn that the angler stays at home when the wind is north, that the east wind is good for neither man nor beast, and that a southerly wind reduces the art of angling to a mere form by generously blowing the bait into the fish's mouth. My own experience is, that the worst enemy to the angler is a sudden change, no matter of what description it may be : and the authorities above referred to knew full well what they were writing when they directed their denunciation, not to a north or east wind as such, but to a strong or cold variety of the same.

How often have we all been in the position of Amicus, who, in Dr. Davy's "Angler and his Friend," confesses that he has been often disappointed "getting no sport when, in my ignorance, the elements—air and water, sun and wind—seemed most promising ; and sometimes, though rarely, having had success when at starting I hardly expected any."

It has doubtless fallen to the experience of every angler to catch fish in north and easterly winds, and to go out upon days that seem made to answer every traditional qualification for sport, yet to realize an unbroken blank. The doctor's more famous brother (but not more capable authority on angling), Sir Humphrey Davy, most truly remarks, by the mouthpiece of Halicus: "We cannot judge of the senses of animals that breathe water—that separate air from water by their gills ; but it seems probable that, as the quality of the water is connected with their life and

health, they must be exquisitely sensible to changes in water, and must have similar relations to it that an animal with the most delicate nasal organs has to air." Of these wonderful instincts we are ignorant. We may have theories, but not knowledge.

My best advice to an angler whose opportunities are few, is never to let wind or weather keep him at home if the water is fishable, for there is always the off-chance that the unexpected will reward him. I know two or three accomplished fly-fishers who are never stopped by an east or north wind, even upon rivers to which those conditions are supposed to be fatal; and there is one well-known Test angler who prefers a north wind to any other. There are some lochs and rivers that are said to fish best under an east wind, but the explanation of this apparent paradox will be found to lie rather in the surrounding land than the quality of the wind. As a rule, however, even for pike-fishing, wind from east or north is not to be petitioned for, nor rude wind from any point of the compass; but I repeat the advice to all who are strong and earnest enough not to care for the personal discomforts of cold and wet—so long as the weather is settled and moderate, do not hesitate to try your luck. Pike will sometimes run well in east and north winds, especially when winter brings "cold Boreas with frosty beard." Rough weather is nearly always charged with a ban on good sport, though there are instances of splendid takes of pike in gales of wind. Our friend John Dennys sums up the case very neatly:—

All windes are hurtfull if too hard they blow,  
The worst of all is that out of the East,  
Whose nature make the Fish to biting slow,  
And lets the pastime most of all the rest;  
The next that comes from countries clad with Snow,  
And *Artique* pole is not offensive least,  
The Southern winde is counted best of all,  
Then, that which riseth where the sunne doth fall.

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Respecting the influence of snow upon angling, only a word or two is necessary, since the pernicious consequences of snow in the water during a thaw are but too familiar to us all. During a hard black frost pike-fishing may be indulged in, not with comfort, perhaps—especially if the sportsman condemns himself to the inaction of live baiting, instead of devoting himself to the splendid exercise of spinning—but, at any rate, with chances of success. While snowflakes falling on the river are not absolutely ruinous, hope may be abandoned the moment a thaw commences, and the water becomes charged with that baleful, blue-grey broth which is the dread of all sportsmen, from the hardy salmon-fisher in North Britain, taking advantage of the earliest fishings, to the Thames angler working either from punt or bank. If ever the angler's case is hopeless, it is at such a time.

The word “luck,” which I have recently used, brings this matter home to me in an acute form, and tempts me to lapse forthwith into narrative. It may be said in anticipation that this is strictly a question of weather. The young friend who took me under his fraternal charge might perhaps be excused for leaving the domestic fireside in the merry Christmas week ; but I now confess, with the sort of repentance that would sin again to-morrow if the chance occurred, that a moderately old stager like myself should have known better than to tempt the fates, especially upon so capricious a river as the Thames. We met at Paddington at the hour when commonplace Christians would be sitting down to breakfast, having driven through a white, cold fog from distant and opposite points of the metropolitan compass. The glass stood well, had been firm for days, and set at fair. For the time of the year it was mild, but a smell of frost was undoubtedly about Regent's Park as I trundled through in a musty hansom.

We were bound on a pike and perch expedition, if anything, and had a right to expect, from the appearances of the morning, that the fog would lift, the sun come out, and compensate us by a pleasant time on the water, if not by bags of fish. But the further we got from town the denser was the white veil of mist. No doubt there was land to right and land to left, though we saw nothing of it. At the junction where we changed carriages, the slippery platform revealed the process of frost, slight, recent, but unmistakable. Not strong enough to harden the ground, as we soon found in crossing the meadows to the lock-house, its penetrating powers had no respect for woollen garments, and went straight to the marrow. The river is very pretty at that point, and the prospects are famous for width of view and variety of combination. All was hidden. The weir water must have been running, as usual, for we heard it twenty yards from the lock bridge, and there was life around, if the ghostly bark of dogs, gobble of turkey, and music of chimes from some shrouded church belfry could be believed.

In this thick fog we embarked, and were poled by our capable fisherman up stream through it. At the outside we could see a dozen yards on either side, and to keep myself warm I elected to spin an artificial bait as the punt proceeded. The despatch of the glittering metal into the unknown was a curious rather than a profitable transaction. A very simple cast took the apparatus out of sight, and one had to listen for its fall into the river. By-and-by we got to the bank down which we were to paternoster for perch, and my young friend began to pull out small perch at once. Just about this time somebody seemed to have stuck a small white plate upon an invisible wall, apparently leagues up in the fog. Was it the sun of Austerlitz, bidding us be of good cheer? But the plate was removed almost at once, and from that moment my heart failed me.

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Under conditions like those I have detailed, if the sun tries to struggle through the fog and is beaten in the attempt, the chances are a thousand to one against your seeing his face again. Long before this we had reached what I have always supposed to be a sublime height of angling experience. The rings of our rods were filled with ice. Everybody knows that an angler relating his experiences can arrive at no sentence more telling than the statement.—

“I fished on till the line froze in the rings.”

There is a spice of endurance, adventure, and novelty to your credit, if you persevere up to this point. But we never got rid of that dense white fog on the river. My companion fished cheerfully throughout, and got his dozen or so of sizeable perch, and a couple of baby jack that took his minnows. On leaving the water we ascended to high ground, and found the atmosphere more clear; but we arrived home with our moustachios frozen, so that the bright fire and kindly lights of the painted chamber to which I was relegated seemed like paradise.

The next day we fished certain preserved waters on the Loddon. There was no fog, but a howling gale chilled us to the bone, and sport there was none. On the first day the white frost did the mischief; on the second day the violent change from breathless air to furious tempest was the evil agent, for the water in both Thames and Loddon was in excellent order. I did, as a matter of fact, secure a very inexperienced jack, but that was the extent of the day's bag. A few days after this profitless expedition I read an ingenious article upon fox stratagems, *apropos* of a hunted specimen that had a short time previously tried to elude Sir Watkin Wynn's hounds by climbing an ivy-covered tree. The writer of the article remarked that tree-climbing is not an uncommon habit of foxes. At

corroboration of this statement was afforded to us during that blustering day on the Loddon. The fisherman pointed to a large and ancient pollard willow, towards which the punt was drifting, as the undoubted home of a fox. We were told that the animal had lived there for months, but had not been seen for some days. We drifted cautiously down, but, unfortunately, he was not at home to us, else one might have succeeded in spinning for fox, and hooking him in the brush with the triangles of a Chapman spinner.

## CHAPTER XVII.

## CHRISTMAS PUFFS.

NOT at all, good reader ! This is to be no praise of a particular brand of tobacco or pattern of pipe, to be clipped out and used hereafter as an advertisement, nor even a great *Te Deum*, more or less after Kingsley, to the virtues of the Nicotian leaf. Few are the anglers I have met who were not good smokers ; yet they, like myself, have always had a habit of changing their brands and patterns, as they change their waters when fished out. Mark how natural it is to the fisherman to burn tobacco when by the water-side. And this, I take it, is partly because one can smoke with more impunity in the open air than in the gas-heated atmosphere of a room, and partly also because the soothing nature of the strange habit accords most heartily with the contemplative man's recreation. The angler's pastime is one of leisurely parts, and the man who cannot smoke with measured puffs and slow had better put out his pipe. Then the angler, as such, ought to be an adept at musing. The mere act of gazing upon a stream, now tranquil, now fierce, but ever-flowing till it is lost in the salt sea, suggests and creates it.

There is so much, too, to think about by the water-side, apart from the gentle exercises of the sport, that many anglers, who are credited by the ignorant with selfish desires —such as “snatching” and the employment of nefarious lures unseen by a corroborative eye—have no worse motive

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in their love of solitude than a wish to be left alone with their thoughts.

Need I add that the musing angler acknowledges in his pipe a properly qualified assistant, who asks for no weekly wage, and who only demands to be kept clean to do honest work? Kingsley, it may be remembered, recommended the gentleman angler to carry a cigar-case, in order by timely presentation of a Havannah to the keeper, to impress him with the fact that you are one of the quality. The world has moved ahead since that Chalk stream study was written, and it is now no absolute disgrace to smoke a pipe under certain reasonable and obvious conditions. The blackest cutty I ever saw was the beloved and well-thumbed companion of a bishop; and I have seen a prince of the blood sucking at a briar-root that was not worth half a crown. Besides, a cigar is not a convenient article for the sportsman in action. The excitements incidental to his pursuit can only be qualified by something upon which the teeth will take a firm grip; while an eye to economy does not wink at a luxury of which the passing breeze takes the lion's share. When, therefore, I talk about puffs from an angler's pipe, I mean pipe; and the keeper may think precisely what he likes upon the subject. The main point towards which I have been working is that the angler is not to be denounced as a profligate, or a sham, or an agnostic, because he is a smoker. To this, that, and the other man, tobacco, I am free to grant, may be all that Jamie the First swore it was; the angler, as I have attempted to argue, may smoke and sin not. Sin or no sin, the fact remains that he generally does it.

The angler at home, in the retirement of his sanctum, sees a good deal of sport in the pipe puffs as they curl, ascend, and dissipate. No figures dancing in the fire into which the maiden dreamer, with all the world before her,

sweetly looks, are more absorbing than those which he watches. They may be more evanescent, but for the moment they are quite as real. Sometimes they recall the past, with its much attempted, its little done; often they are mighty with future possibilities never to be realized. As the private soldier of France was said to carry the marshal's bâton in his knapsack, so the angler's smoke entwines and garnishes that giant salmon which time cannot lessen. Sir Ford North, when presiding at one of the annual dinners of the Fly-fishers' Club, in the course of a capital speech happily explained why angling is so fascinating. There are reasons "too numerous to particularize," but, amongst others, there is this—it is big with hope, and every angler looks forward to the chance (a very far-off chance it is) of proving to an unbelieving generation that the grand old writer was not propounding an idle conundrum when he asked, "Canst thou draw out leviathan with an hook?"

Many of us have puffed out leviathan from the pipebowl, and, after a fearful struggle, safely landed him before he reached the ceiling. There was not, I admit, much to turn out upon the larder slab after the contest, yet there was something in the fancy while it lasted. And, indeed, there are many things more unlikely than that an 80 lbs. salmon will some day be killed with a fly, or that a pike of 60 lbs. or 70 lbs. upwards will be victimized by a spinning bait. Is not such an achievement—not bloodless, but innocent—worth striving after? Though the big fellows would in all likelihood turn out to be a fraud in the matter of sport, the fame of the exploit would be noised abroad, and the hero would have a clear right to a special epitaph; as, "Here lies John Doe. He was a good husband, a kind father, a faithful friend, and he caught the 80 lbs. salmon in the Tay," or, simpler still, "Sacred to the memory of Richard Roe. He slew the monster pike of Lough Derg." The inscriptions

have a most taking look in yonder fast-disappearing cloud of smoke, and, as it outspreads aloft, like the folds of a fairy's veil, I behold unborn Waltonian urchins spelling them out, and resolving to catch something still bigger or perish in the attempt.

At the festive season of the year there is an all-round call upon the imagination. I say nothing about the skates recently purchased, with new boots to hold them, upon the ice—as it most promptly proves—of the future. The Christmas numbers may pass also, seeing that half of them were throttled by a general election the moment they were published. Being the possessor of favourite dogs (under muzzle), I leave others to preach about goodwill to all mankind. Throwing these items in to make weight, there is nevertheless at Christmas time an untold quantity left to the imagination of the free Briton, and to none more than the angler. Some of the youngsters, with water so favourable, will probably smoke their pipes in the punt or on the sodden bank, and, rain keeping off, they ought to give a respectable account of grayling, pike, and perch, and fill up the corners of the bag with roach, dace, and chub.

After forty, however, the majority of us do our Christmas angling from the armchair, and encourage a fair substitute for the real thing in the whirls and eddies of tobacco, rather than of the rushing river. May the brethren out in the open have a right merry time and sport to their soul's content, making the most of the short, dark day, and topping up the merriment of the home circle by appearing in their midst at a respectable hour to be congratulated and admired. For the rest of us, let us dedicate the incense of one pipe at least to the sport we love.

And believe me, of all the angler's memories the best to draw upon are the most far-reaching. There never was and never will be fishing to equal that of the boyish days, when

the world was as young as yourself, and there was nothing wrong and nothing ugly in all creation. In after years you went down to renew your acquaintance with the mill-stream winding through the osier bed, and gliding blithely through the meadow where first you heard the scrape of the whet-stone on the scythe, and snuffed the odour of new-mown hay. In the bend, where the bank had been roughly stopped with clay and shored up with old logs, you caught your first fish. It was a perch. Puff slowly, and, in succession of incident, you shall have the whole process repeated before the pipe is done. You crept between the withies that morning, and peered into the crystal depths ; for, boy-like, you wanted something more solid than faith to begin upon. What a lovely shoal it was ! How the morning sun, after a clear night, slanted upon their golden jackets, frogged with jet black, and adorned with carmine lappets ; and how you trembled as you made ready to drop the savoury brandling into the very centre of the party !

The shoal was numerous, and the head of every fish, slightly tilted up, appeared to be pointed at some common object of regard, to you invisible. In your nervous condition, the sudden somersault of a vole by the rustic hatch well-nigh frightened you out of your small wits ; but you soon recovered, tremblingly watched the scarlet float bob and dart under, and tucked out your perch high in the air.

Yes ; six members of the shoal were removed one after another from the crystal pool, and strung upon an osier twig through the gaping gills. Talk about ecstasy ! why—but enough. If the reader be not an angler, he would not understand me, gush I never so strongly ; if he be an angler, he will comprehend the Alpha and Omega of it all, without another word.

There was one trifling drawback, you may remember. The fishing of the mill-stream had been glorious, but it was

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a stolen pleasure. You slunk home, concealed the rod in the tool-house, and the string of perch in the ivy at the back of the pantry. It was quite on the cards that the head of the household would take an unfriendly view of your pretty excursion, and your courage had sunk to your boots as you crept into the breakfast-room, sidled into a chair, and tackled your bread and milk silently, not wholly free from the torments of an intensified conscience. Think of it when the young scapegrace that now calls you father is in trouble ! Certainly you had an uneasy quarter of an hour just then, and it was the blessed mother, long since laid to sleep under the yew-tree, who by-and-by brought the sun out of the cloud, and herself superintended the frying of the fugitive perch. That is how you became an angler, and we need say nothing, after all these years, about the fact that you caught your perch in the month of May.

Gravid fish were unknown to you then ; no calculations about the vomer, pectoral, and anal disturbed you in those days ; there would be, together with other effects, a piece of twine, a bit of putty, a marble, and half an apple in your pocket, but no microscope or dissecting-knives wherewith to make an autopsy. Nor was the fear of Boards or Mundellas before your eyes. It was the pre-dry-fly era, and you were at peace.

But surely that was not the bonny mill-stream which met your surprised vision from the footbridge when, at length a grown-up angler, proud of salmon slain and wily trout killed, you went down to tread once more in your boyhood's footsteps ? There must be some mistake ! This miserable ditch the river which you were wont to compare vain-gloriously with Thames, Tweed, and Mississippi ? That rickety plank the bridge of which Longfellow's midnight musings reminded you, when first you read the poem ?

Yea, verily. Such is life. Better had the bearded man

kept at home than shatter thus the superb impressions of the jacketed boy. Why did you not keep them as a stock-in-trade for the Christmas smoke? I repeat—such is life.

At least, my own pipe is nearly out, and many of the matters upon which, when I began, I intended to descant must stand over. There is a great fish-head, like Poe's bust of Pallas, just above my chamber door; and another at each corner of the book-case cornice. There are broken rod tops, and battered flies, specimens in spirits, and specimens dry; there are hooks, lines, landing-nets, and gaffs, with a story to each that, by the aid of a modicum of friendly colour, might be made to read passing well. Alas! I have frittered away my opportunity. Is it possible that smoking is after all not altogether perfection, and that it has a tendency to produce garrulity, as cynics say angling does?

At this festive season (the dear old phrase *will* come) we may ignore any such disloyal hints from an evil spirit. I ask pardon for the untold stories, at the same time believing that the reader may possibly have had a narrow escape, and should be congratulated, and not pitied. Be that as it may, the pipe is smoked; and I find that the knocked-out ashes are just enough, by economy in use, the adoption of plain letters without flourishes, and the assistance of a small disgorger, to inscribe to one and all "A Merry Christmas, and a Happy New Year."

Part III.

SKETCHES OF COLONIAL LIFE.



## CHAPTER I.

## TRYING THE BREECH-LOADER.

To confess truly at once, I want to try a new breech-loader. Hitherto a muzzle-loader—and it is not at all certain that, under some circumstances, there is anything better than that form of fowling-piece—has been sufficient for my modest requirements as a gunner, for in the old country what time I could spare away from the journalistic grind-stone was laid at the feet of St. Izaak, and, through him, offered to the incomparable English meadows, valleys, and streams. But in sub-tropical Australia the angler's occupation is almost gone. The sporting instinct, however, like certain diseases—I had well-nigh written *like other diseases*—if driven in, breaks out in another place. And next to the rod comes the gun.

Long habit is so strong upon some of us that, to ramble with anything like pleasure, we require something other than a walking-stick in our hand: it may be a murderous instinct, but there it is, and, for myself, I choose without any hypocritical pretences to follow it. Therefore is the ancient muzzle-loader laid upon the shelf of that peculiarly Colonial institution, the general auction-room, and in its stead reigns an innocent-looking Central Fire, warranted to kill in the most ugly manner. Yet there are excuses to be offered to conscience—to wit, a desire to collect specimens of the birds of the country and the skins of its beasts for

good friends at the other end of the world, and a determination to learn the ways of both bird and beast. Need it be said that such an object can best be achieved by calling upon these wild creatures at their own homes, and, to be plain, making it a regular matter of hunt and kill?

So, upon this understanding, let us set forth on our ramble. It is early spring, and the morning deliciously fresh. A Queensland winter is the very perfection of climate; clear, cool nights, and days of Italian sky, with heat never exceeding that of an English June. It is surely something that week after week, month after month, you may be certain of glad sunshine and pure skies. The atmosphere is balmy, as our footsteps, on this September morning, disturb the copious dew upon the brown, perished grass. The goats are snatching a fearful joy amongst the flower-beds and fruit-gardens of such careless citizens as last night neglected to fasten the wicket or put up the slip rail in the hardwood fence, knowing well the punishment that awaits them should the injured proprietor discover them in the act of depredation. Cocks are crowing, and from all the hilly suburbs recently-roused dogs respond in eloquent howl. Up, swift and magnificent, comes the sun over the sleeping city, its broad river, its public buildings and wharves.

The Member is a capital companion for a ramble, for he permits you to be sarcastic and jocular at his expense and never pays back in kind; is a naturalist to the core, theoretical and practical; has the big heart of a true sportsman, and skill that gained him the reputation of an eye-wiper at Hendon and Hurlingham; and is sufficiently a "new chum" not to have lost his home loves and recollections.

Smartly we step out and breast the hill from which Brisbane, and the river running through its midst, lie in

panoramic show below us, the mountain ridges beyond shaking off the morning haze, until the forest-trees catch their first light and shade. I draw my companion's attention to the famished cattle by the wayside, and remark upon the ruin which the long drought must entail, not only upon the small dairy-farmers, but upon big squatters whose losses in one year will be reckoned by tens of thousands of pounds. He only grunts a response. We pass a rope-walk, the operations of which are clogged by the absurd tariffs which vex and harass all Colonial trade. He looks on the other side, with a far-off gaze.

“What would I give,” he says, “to be with the dear old dad to-day? I would wager something he is out amongst the turnips, making good account with the birds, and with dogs at heel obedient and faithful to death. Ah! Don’t fire! You mustn’t shoot within the municipality.”

The warning comes too late. I have tried the new breech-loader—a flying shot at forty yards, and a useless leatherhead is the result. I wanted a leatherhead. For days he and his kin have aroused my curiosity and interest. In the Botanical Gardens the *Grevillea*, or silky oak, has been in blossom, very gay against the dark, tropical and subtropical foliage of other trees, and with its flat masses of orange completely hiding the branches, which as yet are bare of leaves. To these honey-laden stores the leatherheads gathered, feeding, romping, flirting, fighting, and more talkative than the legislators whose Parliament House is within earshot of the scene. There is little song amongst these feathered feasters, but great uproar. For a long time I am deceived into fancying they are the familiar jackdaw of the old country, though well aware that the homely music of that respectable bird is never heard in these parts. But I soon discover that the leatherhead is, in the matter of vocal powers, a very versatile genius; he

chuckles, crows, chatters, whistles, and quacks in the quaintest manner, always loud, abrupt, and jolly. Hence I mark him for my own as soon as opportunity offers.

The Leatherhead, now that I pick him up, turns out to be a singular bird in appearance as well as habit. He has been rifling an adjacent garden. His long, sharply curved, and (considering the bird is no bigger than a fieldfare) large beak and slender, feathery tongue proclaim him a honey-eater, though the leathery skin, instead of feathers, covering the head and neck gives him the disagreeable appearance of the vulture brood. This skin is generally a dirty black; but my specimen is a rarer description, the colour being a pale blue. Round the bottom of the neck lies a collaret of fine hackles; the general plumage is a shabby olive-brown, with dingy white underneath; there are black markings on the wings, and he has a white-tipped tail. He is sometimes called the bald-headed friar, but he is a friar with a knobby excrescence on the top of his baldness, and he enjoys the distinction of being one of the most plebeian of the bush birds.

On yonder post and rails, close to the road, is a bird equally familiar, but more popular, generally known as the Laughing Jackass, and scientifically as the *Dacelo gigas*. Everybody who writes about Australia has something to say of this bird, and the friendly regard in which he is held. The pot-hunter (knowing probably that he is an unmarketable commodity) grants him lease of life; and so far have even I respected the sentiment that I am content to exclude him from my list of specimens unless I can secure him alive. On the whole, however, I would rather kill him outright than reduce him to the sorry, draggletail plight in which he appears when caged. He is a snake-killer, and that is perhaps the secret of his immunity. Yet I believe he is sometimes a rogue amongst chickens and eggs, and

to some extent, like many other folks both in his sphere of life and ours, enjoys an undeserved reputation. The confidence he places in humanity assists also to protect him. Observe the comical-looking fellow a dozen yards off. His wise old head is screwed knowingly on one side ; his eye, half closed, suggests a familiar wink ; and his stolid demeanour and large head fathomless wisdom.

As if he knows we are making him the subject of our criticism, he at length slowly flies from the fence and perches not many yards farther afield in a dead gum-tree. He appears to have a fondness for a nice, dead, gallows-looking gum-tree, and both bird and tree become more weird by close association. Some people pretend to discover joyousness in his so-called laugh. To me there has always seemed to be a strong touch of the diabolical in the peal which he sends echoing through the lonely bush, as if the unquiet spirit of one of the murderous bushrangers that used to trouble the land had entered into the bird, prompting it at day-dawn to arouse the sleeper from his repose, either to warn him to be wary or to chuckle over his approaching doom.

Crossing a bridge over an arm of the river ("creek" it is called in the colonies), we pause to survey the fair scene, wondering meanwhile what sort of a season it has been on the far-off salmon and trout fisheries we knew so well, and whether the pike and barbel fishing in the Thames and Lea have been good ; recalling the swims and stations we in common have frequented, and wishing for just one day more upon them. The river is alive with mullet. Heavy fish of four and six pounds spring high out of the water again and again, and generally either across or against the tide. Lower down, a few fishermen get a living by catching them, but the difficulty experienced in bringing fish fresh to market seems fatal to the establishment of a fish-

market in Brisbane. Its fish supply should be most abundant ; it is the most contemptible. Nobody, as yet, seems to have learned how to capture these fine sea-mullet with hook and line ; but they must have their weakness, if only one could find out what it is.

The sun, fairly risen, mounts at once into the sky, and compels us to moderate our pace. To the left there is a hedge of feathery-foliaged acacia, whose yellow flowers are a pleasant relief to the pale green leaves. The dairyman's fence opposite displays a coping, a hundred yards long, of pretty bunch roses—a small Chinese variety that bears profusely for a little while, but which, in common with most of the English flowers out here, falls to pieces as soon as it has opened into bloom. Fragrant white blossoms appear amidst the dark foliage of the orange-trees ; the young bananas are shooting upwards their long smooth leaves, to be split into ribbons by the first westerly gale. John Chinaman, hard by, is watering his garden with a quiet perseverance that no European colonists bring to bear upon the cultivation of vegetables. There he goes to the water-hole, with two kerosine tins suspended from a slender bamboo-pole over his shoulder ; and if he knew it would pour with rain during the next hour, he would plod on with his watering until the downfall began. The English dairyman, giving us "Good day" over the fence, tells us that three more of his herd have been found dead in the swamp, from which, having been bogged in their painful efforts to find water, they are unable to rise evermore.

Soon we turn into what the early settlers named bush. It is a misnomer. The Australian bush is forest, sometimes close, oftener open, and always peopled with the Eucalypti—white gum, blue gum, bloodwood, iron bark, stringy bark, and other large and useful trees. Nothing can be farther from the English idea of bush than country covered with

these trees, for there is no undergrowth, and the foliage of the gum-tree is probably the most miserably scanty and sombre of any in wide creation. The small pointed leaves are few and dull-coloured, and they complete their offences by drooping downwards, presenting nothing but their sharp, straight edges to the sun. Lest the entire economy of the tree should not be in harmony, Nature has carried her unfriendliness even further, by making the trunk smooth, glazed, and tall, and has furnished it with a wretched head of unpicturesque branches that do not break out within fifty feet or more from the ground. At times of the year when the gum-tree sheds its bark (its leaves remaining all the year round) the trunks resemble a vast assortment of smooth round whitewashed posts. There are no heavy wrinkles, no gnarled knots, no possible feature to make it akin to our own forest-trees.

Individually the gum-tree is, in truth, a melancholy spectacle; and in the company of his fellows, ranging over thousands of miles of ridge, gully, and mountain, it imparts to the Australian bush a monotony which is a fatal ban to beauty of scenery. The first business of the settler is to take an axe and ring as many of the trees as he can. They die forthwith, and, denuded of their little leaf covering, shine white, weird, and ugly in the sun. But in this gaunt lifelessness they give the grass a better chance, and by-and-by, when there is time and opportunity to destroy them, they offer a minimum of resistance to fire.

The bush into which we enter is solitude complete. How different would be the commonest corner of British copse! The Member takes one side of a fast drying swamp full of reeds and rushes, and I take the other. A few hundred yards farther up there is still, in the middle of what was once a lagoon, a muddy puddle where duck may perhaps be found before the morning flight. There are

none now. Yet out of the crackling reeds rises with lazy soar a large, long-legged, long-necked, long-billed brown and white mottled bird, which the Member espies. That is sufficient; there is a far-echoing report, and a fine young bittern flutters on the ground, and dies, to be in due time the central ornament of a collection.

Numbers of sedge warblers, blue-tailed wrens, and blood-birds, smallest of Australian birds, are startled out of the reeds, or by the margin, and disappear with tiny twitters of affright; a blue crane makes away over the trees, rousing from its roost a kite who is soon joined by another of the hawk tribe. A couple of kingfishers hereabouts become my property. The first is the sacred kingfisher, marked with lustrous dark blue above, and deep chestnut beneath, but with all its loveliness not to be compared to the flashing beauty that lives an angler's life on our home river-banks. The second is a commoner kind, with pale blue on the upper part, and pure white belly. You meet with this fellow even in the interior, and under circumstances which forbid the theory that a fish diet is necessary to his existence. His favourite resting-place is the withered branch of a small tree, and he and his kin are very common in the bush, through which their shrewish whistle constantly resounds.

Our ramble is prolonged, but unremunerative—a result to which the Queensland sportsman soon gets accustomed. A noble marquis who was Governor in the Colony a few years ago, was as keen a sportsman as ever lived, but after one of his many fruitless expeditions into the dominions he governed he declared he would henceforth relegate his gun to its case so long as he remained in Queensland. My friend yields himself up to a similar depression of thought, and proposes that we should stack our arms and smoke the pipe of reflection, seated on a prostrate log.

This movement is effected as soon as proposed, and we moralize, making comparisons between life in England and life in Queensland.

The pleasures of memory are amongst the chief blessings vouchsafed to humanity, but they should be indulged in sparingly. Comparisons which give rise to discontent are unwholesome mental food. A man who is continually calling up the past to depreciate the present never makes a good colonist. He is the man to whom applies the parable of new wine and old bottles. Therefore let the emigrant, the moment he becomes the immigrant, learn the art of temperance in the pleasures of memory.

What do we gain by sitting upon this big hollow gum-tree stem and gossiping of the melody of blackbird and thrush, of the waving of poplars, and the murmur of elm and beech branches? Better to see whether our eyes and ears cannot gather in a few grains of comfort from immediate surroundings. Admonishing ourselves in this strain we soon discover that we have advised ourselves wisely. We had both been assured by our respective friends before sailing from home that in Australia the birds have no song and the flowers no perfume.

The birds have song, and plenty of it, but no sustained song. A little fantail, even as we talk, hops about upon a neighbouring log, familiar, loquacious, and brisk as a robin. It would almost seem that it knows the subject of our conversation, and is anxious to be the first to claim notice. It is the Shepherd's Companion, so called; and were it smaller, and less thick in proportion to its size, it might pass as the pied wagtail of the British Islands. Its impudence is unbounded; and so is its faith in mankind. Now it sweeps with graceful curve into a tree; now it runs with outspread tail along the grass, calling loudly in a roughish tone, and generally ending its call with an abrupt flourish that has

gained for it amongst the bushmen of southern colonies the name of stock-whip bird. For days the bushman sees no other living creature near him, and the shepherd, weary of his everlasting flocks, loves, by way of change, to watch the bird as it alights upon the sheep's back.

Away to the left the replenished company of nimble warblers, red, blue, yellow, and brown, and the birds scarce bigger than a cockchafer, are wheeling in and out of the young saplings in full, sweet, but small chorus. Behind me comes a sudden gush of real melody from a magpie: it consists of but three or four notes, liquid and mellow as the nightingale's flute, and, consequently, charming though the sounds be, they stop short of actual song. We have a variety of magpies in the country, and their black and white plumage is always an agreeable sight in the forest. Next, by way of contrast, a crow passes, with stentorian caw, awakening from some unseen retreat a family of leatherheads, who excite themselves into an orgie of comical discord. It is, then, unjust to say that the Australian birds have no song. Even here, a spot peculiarly unfavourable for birds, we have our concert such as it is, knowing meanwhile that our performers represent the most remote rank of the ornithological orchestra.

As to flowers, there is not a specimen to be seen. Bush flowers are rare except in the later spring, and then they are scarce, hard to find, scentless, and, though not without attractiveness of colour and form, wonderfully fragile. Gorgeous flowers there are in the Colonies, but they must be sought elsewhere than in the bush.

And now the Member knocks the ashes out of his pipe, and leads the way over a ridge back towards the river. Whizz ! whizz ! whizz ! Bang ! bang ! The three quails that started out of the high grass on the knoll are reduced to a minority of one. Sometimes the quail shooting is ex-

tremely good, and as the bird gets away at express speed and is withal much smaller than the English quail, a quick eye and instinctive aim are necessary. The pity is that they have few sporting dogs in the Colony. Quail are very cunning, frequently lying close until you are upon them, running like hares when disturbed, and flying straight when put up. My friend one day shot fourteen brace of Australian partridge, or quail, besides other game; but this was one of the brilliant exceptions, to be set against a vast quantity of blanks. Occasionally quail disappear from a district for a couple of years, and return. The Darling Downs were in this manner forsaken until the fourth season, when the birds came back in such numbers that a man shot forty brace in one day. As the country becomes settled other birds disappear, and disappear to such an extent that the Queensland Parliament passed a Native Birds' Protection Act, defining close seasons for all the birds worth preserving. The opponents of the measure raised a cry against the introduction of what they were pleased to denounce as a game law, but the Bill was placed in the statute-book and is working well, notwithstanding that some of the fence months are not the fence months of Nature. The quail, contrary to other game-birds, rather increases with settlement, and makes its home at once in cultivated patches of ground.

The rare birds are to be found in the scrub, but the corner towards which, bagging our quail, we now move is too convenient for the young Brisbanian and his single barrel to be worth much. There are, however, a few blossoms out, and we shall be certain of meeting with something in the shape of a honey-eater. Scrub is more after our English notions of bush; its undergrowth is dense, and it affords ample cover for beast and shade for man. The best scrub land is the rich alluvial soil along the banks of

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the rivers, and this is in great request by the agriculturist. The pastoralist, that is to say, the grazier who holds cattle and sheep-runs, sometimes of thousands of square miles in extent, occupies the bush, where cultivation is not attempted and where the flocks and herds roam over boundless areas of natural grasses, which vary in richness according to districts and the prevalence of rain. The sugar-planter, the maize-grower, and the farmer take the scrub, clear it, and lay bare the black virgin soil, capable of any demands that may be made upon it. In the scrub, whatever is beautiful and rare is to be found. Glorious creepers, flowering and dense ; shrubs, glossy, green, and adorned with boldly coloured blossom and berry ; intertwined vines twisting around and up trees, some of which are as grand as the gum-trees are mean—these are amongst the characteristics of scrub. Other peculiarities will transpire as from time to time we have occasion to penetrate them.

The English reader may be already asking what we are doing that I have not as yet made mention of kangaroos and parrots. We have, in truth, seen none, and may make fifty suburban excursions without doing so. Kangaroos there are, as Queenslanders know to their cost. At that time, driven from the back country by the drought, they were ruining the small farmers, and causing even the prosperous squatter to raise an alarm. Government was invoked to destroy them by State aid. They were advancing in countless thousands, devouring what little stubble grass remained, and laying bare entire districts. I met a gentleman at that period, upon whose run 10,000 sheep had perished within three months—perished from kangaroo depredations as much as from drought. Not fifty miles from Brisbane, a *battue* party had recently shot 2000 kangaroos in a week.

We may find one or two parrots by-and-by amongst the

Banksias—the Australian honeysuckle. The common name, however, of this tree conveys no idea of the flower to the new-comer. In his mind it is associated with cottage eaves and cool arbours, over which the woodbines twine, as many a poet has sung. The banksia is a rough and ugly tree, from twelve to thirty feet high, ragged to a degree both as to branch and foliage, and sombre-coloured. The timber is worthless, and—unpardonable offence in a Colonial's eyes—bad for burning. It flowers in the autumn, and remains in flower far into the winter. The blossoms are upright cones of cream-coloured down, laden with honey, and so long as they remain they impart a temporary prettiness to the otherwise gloomy branches.

As I anticipated, here, on the edge of the scrub, we hear the sharp, short scream of a flock of Blue Mountaineers. This parrot is an inveterate honey-eater. So pretty a bird should, by right, eat nothing but honey, nor sip aught but nectar. We hear their scream, and in an instant they are gone. We catch a momentary glimpse of the little band, four at the most, flying high overhead ; as they diverge sharply from their arrow-like course, the sunshine strikes a gorgeous admixture of burnished sapphire, emerald, orange, gold, crimson. It is an instantaneous flash of colours that might shame the rainbow. Shooting them now is out of the question, though I must make confession that since that morning, in more remote situations, they have furnished me as savoury a dish as epicure might desire.

My specimens in the scrub are increased by a butcher-bird, or lesser crow-shrike, a pied fellow gifted with a pleasant note, and easily domesticated ; three of the orioles, one speckled like a thrush, another with dull green back and white and black breast, and a pair of small flycatchers.

In making our way out of the scrub, where the mos-

quitoes have given us more welcome than accorded with comfort, I nearly tread upon a green tree-snake. The reptile, to be true to habit and tradition, should have been snug in winter-quarters, but the unusual heat of the weather has tempted it forth to coil in the sun, which at this spot pours through a break in the foliage. It seems almost too indifferent to bestir itself. It is a happy feature of snake character that it is not aggressive. Quick to act on the defensive, if attacked or accidentally molested, snakes are equally quick in escaping from your path, and glide off unseen with surprising celerity. The comparatively cold night, however, has made our friend sluggish, and it raises its head, and in sinuous measure passes over a bit of brown rock, upon which its metallic green glistens with the strange fascination which all snakes seem to exercise.

My comrade is looking for a stick. I present arms. Man, woman, and child religiously kill every snake that comes within reach. It is a duty owed to society. Thirty yards up the rocky steep I presently see a long thin line wriggling over a boulder, and upon the boulder it soon lies cut in half by a charge of Number Eight. It is a cartridge well wasted. The snake has nearly the best of it after all, for its head, with four inches of body, is already in a cleft of rock, leaving a couple of feet of writhing ugliness, free and detached, for the breakfast of the first Laughing Jackass or crow that shall pounce upon it.

Snakes are a nuisance and danger wherever they exist, and they do exist in abundance in all the Australian Colonies; but, in addition to their fortunate eagerness to evade the presence of man, they are easily killed. A slight blow from a stick across the back disables them, and by approaching the enemy sideways and with caution the operation may be performed with safety. When we remember the number of venomous snakes in the country,

it is surprising how few deaths occur from their bite, and this gratifying state of things is no doubt largely due to the fact that the snake is far more fearful than vicious.

The sun is now shining strongly, and our morning's ramble is over, save the return tramp. We overtake a company of aborigines about a mile outside the town, followed as usual by a troop of mangy, treacherous, mongrel dogs, that slink out of our way, seemingly conscious that they are the pariahs of their kind. Yet the dogs are, if possible, more respectable than their owners—the ragged, debased, hopeless Australian natives who hang about the towns, in which the law does not allow them to sojourn after nightfall. They come in during the day with ferns, collect a few pence, and contrive, though selling liquor to the blacks is a penal offence, to return to their gunyahs in the bush the worse for rum. Strange that all efforts to civilize these unfortunates, except in isolated instances, have signally failed!

Close upon the outskirts of Kangaroo Point, which was the aristocratic suburb of the Queensland metropolis, we halt to witness the fashion in which the colonial breaks in a horse. It is a fashion luckily going out of date, and the result is a direct improvement in horseflesh. Here, however, the thing is being done in the bad old style. The victim is a good-looking chestnut mare, the breakers are a couple of butcher lads and one of those men-of-all-work who abound in the Colonies. The finishing touches are being put to the first act as we pause. It is simple in its cruelty. A rope has been tied over the head, and a turn taken around the under jaw; the animal loosened, and smarting under the brutality which characterizes every incident of the preliminaries, has naturally bounded off plunging and snorting. She runs to the end of the cord, say

ten or twelve yards, and is then brought up sharply by the man at the other end. Simultaneously, blows from a heavy stock-whip rain upon her quivering hide. The mare becomes frantic, and the blows rain on, as, straining at the tightened cord, she plunges around the circle.

What could be more simple? The beast has to be cowed; her spirit must be broken. Could anything be more simple? Bob, exhausted, gives up the stock-whip to Jack, and the blows are signalled by cracks like file-firing. Round and round, eyeball glaring, flanks shrinking, nostrils distended, and chest all crimson with flakes of bloody froth, the chestnut dances, mad with pain. Bob then relieves Jack, and so the game goes on. The cord has made the lower part of the mare's head a mass of raw flesh; the whip-thong has left wheals everywhere. By-and-by the mare gives in from sheer exhaustion, and stands shivering near the fence, no longer bounding at each application of the whip, but shrinking in pitiful resignation.

Within an hour she seems to have aged a score of years. She has no strength to resist the putting on of saddle and bridle. She pig-jumps a trifle, however, when the breaker-in-chief mounts, but soon succumbs and clumsily trots frightened round the paddock, Bob and Jack closely following with the ready whip. The mare, now supposed to be broken in, will probably be sold before long as thoroughly trained, and will be a delusion and a snare to every owner for the remainder of her days, execrated as an intractable brute, though with proper treatment she might have been docility itself.

## CHAPTER II.

## RIVER FISHING.

IF the water in the river was very fresh or very salt, sport with such fish as we angled for was apt to be poor. Brisbane city takes its name from the river, the mouth of which is over a score of miles distant. It is a navigable stream to that extent for large ocean-going steamers, and when the comprehensive system of dredging away the bars and shoals undertaken by the Government shall have improved the channel, it will be navigable for the largest. The angling is very precarious, as that sport is almost everywhere, but when the word is given that fish are about, there is always a devoted band of citizens who push off in their punts and boats to try their fortunes. Let me invite the reader to come afloat for a few hours, and form an idea of the sport.

The water is getting quite salt again, so that sharks have been reported prowling in the city waters, with their ugly back fins poked out of the water like a wicked shoulder-of-mutton sail steering a piratical craft in search of more victims. Crossing the ferry late last night in the dark, I heard the flip, flop, smick, smack of big fish in the eddy near which the Sydney steamers lie. From the said steamers offal—and good food, too, outcast from the cook's galley—is continually thrown overboard, and before the tide catches it in its strong fingers and bears it out to sea, the

fish, great and small, fight for their share. I knew by these tokens that the Jew-fish were up once more in the river. There was no mistaking their manner of plunging when once you had become acquainted with it. The sea-mullet would leap, and then fall back with a sharper thwack upon the surface. Besides, they never ventured near the jetties, but kept a fair course, travelling in shoals mid-stream.

They were no doubt, then, Jew-fish (a variety of the *Sciæna* family, of which the *Maigre* is the Mediterranean representative) that I heard, and had I not been so tired after a night's professional work in Parliament, I should have been amongst them, dark as it was. At such times you may obtain heavy bags by fishing with a long line, a big float, and not more than a foot length below it. With that method you allow the bait to drift away, and very soon you may get a run that will turn your line into a lancet, if you permit it to travel across the under part of your forefinger. We will leave them, however, to-night, and wait for to-morrow's tide.

John Chinaman, who hawks fish as well as vegetables, fortunately has a fresh store of mullet for our purpose. Fish being very plentiful in these Antipodean waters, the householder experiences, of course, the usual difficulty in getting a supply, for, in hot weather, the impossibility of keeping it presents too many risks to make fishmongering a paying business. I hear the bland Chinee, however, on this particular morning piping, in his thin cheery voice, over the garden rails his "Welly nice pish, missee," and I shout instructions to close with him for a brace of mullet—two pounders, at fourpence a piece. The fish has to be cut in blocks about walnut size, and there is no necessity to be particular in removing the bones. In the absence of this bait we should have had to gather prawns, with our little muslin shrimp-net, out of the river at the bottom of the

garden, and if they failed, as they frequently did when most needed, we should have been driven to the *dernier resort* of fresh beef.

Our fishing-boat is home made, fashioned somewhat on the lines of the Thames punt, only stouter, broader, and shorter, and thickly coated with tar to keep out a destructive worm called the cobra, which eats away ordinary wood under water with amazing rapidity. No well was required, but handy lockers were placed in stem and stern. There was a stiffish little anchor, with seven or eight fathoms of rope or chain, and if to this you add a boat-hook and mop, a sharp sheath-knife for cutting up bait, and a tomahawk for contingencies, also a gaff as a luxury, you have the equipment complete. We pull lazily up in-shore against the last of the ebb, the time to fish being at the turn of the tides. Consequently if we are having a regular day out we shall take advantage of low water, and persevere on to the turn of the flood, though during the hours when the current is strong little is ever done. The lines used for Jew-fishing vary from shark to large salmon size; and when the fish are feeding well, a size or so this or that way makes no material difference. But it is best to adhere to that first canon of the true fisherman's creed, and use as light tackle as the character of the fish demands. The incessant hauling, however, from the bottom of deep strong water, with leads varying from one pound to three, according to the strength of the tide, plays havoc with the hands, and my plan is to knot on a short length of reasonable cord at the bottom.

The best form of hook is the large Limerick, fixed direct to the line by a series of half-turns. Gimp and gut we have tried, and renounced—save at exceptional times—as superfluous and even unsafe. The rule is to strike your fish, and haul him in hand over hand, as in English sea-fishing.

Our favourite spot is in the middle of the river, where

a sandy spot is known to rise shelving above the surrounding mud. The line will sink away with the tide, and so holding it, stretched across the first joint of the forefinger, we notice every trembling motion, and anxiously wait for downright bites. Be patient. We have to wait a long while sometimes, and even go home with nothing to show.

Do you say that you feel something now? No doubt you do. Something has been nibbling at me from the first, and I fear me the big fish are not yet about. Suppose we remove our junks of mullet, and put on instead one of those prawns which I had the foresight to provide. By this innocent dodge we often get to know what it is that worries us. So then ; let us try again. Now notice the more frequent but still faint bites. The hook is evidently too large for the intruders, but one of them will try this game once too often. Gently, there. If you pull up your line *very* gently, right to the top of the water, you will see what you will see. Just as I expected ; it is a crab, and that little jerk you gave—it was done involuntarily, I know, on the same principle as the thought-reader's "patient" guides the thought-reader—caused it to let go, and fall back into the depths.

Here cometh a queer little customer, with a bull head, and a stout little body, and a dirty yellow jacket. They call him a perch in these parts, though there is not a bit of perch about him. One Good Friday a party of us sat here, and caught six dozen of the useless vermin in the course of an hour. You had better haul in and see that your bait has not been mashed by crabs. But at last you have struck a fish ; although, as you say you were not conscious of a bite, you probably have a flathead. The wretches—we never care much for their poisonous spikes, even if they are excellent eating—lie close on the ground, and often gorge the bait so stealthily that you have no indication of

their presence. Then the neat saw-work with which their jaws are furnished, is apt to cut your line, and leave you lamenting the loss of your hook. And, as I live, that is what has happened now. But I am into a heavy plunger myself, and will snood on your hook when I have settled my own business. How it pulls, dead, sinuously, sullenly.

Get the tomahawk ready, for this is a gentleman to whom we give no quarter. It is an Austral eel. You will see his coppery skin presently, and a pair of slender, serrated jaws as long as a pelican's bill. This description of eel is full of small bones, and our only care must be to get rid of it. Had your line been down, he would have tied himself up in it long ago. There he is—five feet long, with a feathery fin running all down his back and belly, and you can hear his jaws snapping like a pair of castanets as often as I get his head out of water. What I want is to see his neck on the outer edge of the gunwale thus, and chop him in twain with the tomahawk so, leaving his body slenderly waving like seaweed to drift with the tide. John Chinaman eats this so-called pike eel, and relishes it as a dainty morsel, but he first, with patience which the better-fed European cannot understand, extracts every one of the fine bones with a pair of tweezers.

Aha! I have felt a Jew-fish at last. Sometimes, in their best humour, these fish bite twice, and then run boldly; sometimes, more modest-minded, they lift the bait very gingerly. That is what they are doing to-day, and they will be no small fish either. Here he comes again. Observe that the line seems to steal away like a thief in the night; and now is the moment to strike home. I let him play on a tight line for a matter of thirty seconds, or thereabouts, and then in he comes, the sun shining upon as beautiful a combination of colours as you ever saw. Look at the yellow—gamboge yellow—of the head, the purple sheen of

the back, the exquisite violet of the gill-covers, the row of pearls down the middle of the side! He is shaped very like a salmon, and he is at least eight pounds. Yet in five minutes the lovely tints will have faded away, and a dingy brown and grey will have replaced the purple and silver and yellow.

It behoves us henceforth to fish smartly, and get all we can while the tide is slack. The sun shines, let us make our hay. The sport is generally just now short and sharp. Strike hard, and give no quarter. We inevitably lose one now and another again; but, somehow, when the biting has ceased, and we coil down our lines, we have ten fish—9 lbs.,  $8\frac{1}{2}$  lbs, and the rest 5 lbs. or 6 lbs. a piece. Let that content us to-day. The Jew-fish are poor eating, and none of these will find their way into *our* pot. On the whole, it should be confessed we have had an excellent morning's sport. We shall come a dozen times, perhaps, without catching more than a brace of fish, and there are bad days when we certainly should not get even that. The tide is going gaily along with us on our return home, and if you will take the oars I will tell you how C. and I one day got a "whopper" down by the powder-magazine. What is the largest Jew-fish I have known? Well, I have heard of one of 60 lbs. being taken on a hand-line, and one of 30 lbs. in a net, but my own experience is, with the one exception which I will relate, that fish between fifteen and twenty pounds are a large sample.

Hear then my story. I drove Master Edward down to the powder-magazine one day, and we took our guns and fishing-gear. He was a dead hand with a duck, or snipe, or curlew, or anything else that had wings, and there was a chance of such fowl on the brackish lagoons near the river at this spot. Moreover, it was very pleasant to sit by the river-bank with the gentle Edward, and chat about the

Tweed and Don, thousands of miles at the upper end of the world, and the moorland shootings—all of which we remembered well, and loved much. We got no fish for hours, but Edward dropped a curlew, and demolished a water-rail, which innocently flew near us, fancying, it may be, we had forgotten the guns. Edward, I should explain, was not fishing with a hand-line, but with an ancient bottom rod and the dressed line he used to handle when in quest of the English perch. It was altogether a sort of tackle which I should have been loath to employ in ordinary pike work.

But, as we laughingly said, it did not matter, as the proper period of the tide seemed to be passing without any luck for us. Four or five cat-fish, as useless as the pike eels, and just as slimy, lay dry in the sun on the grass behind us, sole evidence of our success. By-and-by I went to give the mare her feed of maize and chaff preparatory to harnessing up for the return journey, and on my return to the river I found E., with his rod bent into a nice arch, the line taut, and the angler puzzled.

“Are you foul?” I asked.

“I am afraid that’s what it is,” he answered.

“Yet,” I observed, “there is no log there. I know the place well at low water, and the bottom is hard, save for the thin coating of mud. Did you get no bite?”

“No,” he explained, “I thought the line ran, but when I felt cautiously the hook seemed fixed.”

“Strike, anyhow,” I said.

And he struck. The motion that followed was precisely what would have happened if a barge submerged had gone slowly out to deep water. But we knew better: knew that E. had got attached to one of the monsters of the deep. The thing moved slowly to and fro, backwards and forwards, an almost dead weight. Had there been anything like a smart run, the slender tackle and willowy rod must

have gone in an instant. Edward kept the line taut, fearing to come to final conclusions, and after he had been in the custody of the fish for half an hour, he signified that he was tired, and invited me to take the rod. I did so, and felt that something very like a log of wood was eddying mysteriously about with the tide. But there was life at the end of the line, even if it were not exuberant or fierce. I gave the unknown quantity the butt, if one could be said to give anything from such an apparent toy. Then there was a lazy but ponderous waggle, and a sudden slackening of the line.

“He’s off!” cried the sorrowful Edward.

“Not a bit of it,” I said. “He’s made for shore, that’s all.”

Inch by inch I now reeled in the line, and the something after it, and soon in the water at our feet we saw a magnificent length and breadth of salmon-like fish, gleaming white in the green tide. Edward thrust in the gaff, and lifted out a Jew-fish, of which the after portion from just behind the dorsal fin had been bitten clean off. The remnant that we brought home weighed  $28\frac{1}{2}$  lbs. hours after it was taken from the water. What happened must have been this: at the time when the line slackened a shark, that had been attracted by the fish’s movements, must have grabbed him and cut off a section clean as a whistle. The shark had probably been lying off at no great distance from the bank, and this was why the Jew-fish did not make tracks as soon as he was hooked. He could not quite understand what disaster had befallen him, and the hook probably quite puzzled him; but he did understand the sort of fate in store for him if he swam out to where his familiar enemy was lying *perdu*. On the whole it was a very funny adventure.

On returning to England my friend exhibited the head of

this fish, stuffed by Cooper, at the Fisheries Exhibition. Soon after he died suddenly, and his family sent me the relic, as a memento of our friendship and wanderings together in Queensland. When I look at the open jaws over my dining-room door, I cannot but think, with sadness relieved by pleasant recollections, of one of the best of good fellows cut off suddenly in the days of his youth.

## CHAPTER III.

## THE HORSE-HUNTER.

ALMOST impossible as it seems that, in a vast grazing continent like Australia, the land can be overfed, it yet remains a fact that heavy stocking is one of the evils of pastoral pursuits in the colonies. Squatters are not different from other human beings in their haste to acquire riches, and they pay the usual penalty of often killing the goose that lays the golden eggs. The eager pastoralist crowds his run with more sheep or cattle than it can bear, the fine wild herbage disappears, the land becomes impoverished; and he sells his vested interests, and moves farther afield to repeat the process. Greater care is now being exercised in the preservation as well as acquisition of the natural grasses; squatters, learning wisdom by the misfortunes of others, are becoming convinced that the pastures require rest, and that excessive consumption must be avoided. Amongst the wasteful consumers are to be included the few wild creatures peculiar to the country. The worst are the kangaroos, which exist everywhere. Upon the run of which I now write, the wild horses, called "brombies," were prominent in the category of nuisances; and as they are the nobler animal, of them will I first speak.

For a while I could not bear the idea of shooting down the friend that one learns so soon and so truly to love. By comparison with such an act, the shooting of a fox seems to

me an absolute virtue. But the wretched aboriginal has to be "improved off" the face of the earth to make room for the white man; and, as the wild horse eats an abundance of grass, and dispossesses the bullocks of their lawful food—is it not but fair and needful that he too must be removed?

It is a clear necessity. Besides, horseflesh is ridiculously cheap in Australia. I have seen a horse sold for thirty shillings. He was, doubtless, a sorry sample of unadorned framework, and was as aged as the fancy liked to make him; but he was capable of some work, could be spurred into a canter, and might at a remote period be fed into something like condition. It may be therefore surmised that, taking into consideration the quantity of grass he consumes, and the trouble of taming and getting to market, the cheapest use to which the "bromby" can be put is to shoot him. Yet again I must say it, the idea is even now revolting; and remembering the difficulty there is of obtaining good remounts for India—not very far off from North Australia, in these days of rapid steaming—it is a pity indeed that these roaming herds cannot be more largely utilized for the service of man.

There are not many stations probably, out of this one district under review, where these animals are to be found in any quantity; but the hunter whose acquaintance I made had, during the two years previous to my acquaintance with him, shot 3000 horses. The station at the same time broke in as many as it required for its own purposes; out of 170 upon the roll of disposable horses at the time of my visit, 84 had been captured wild, and converted into hardy, game, docile creatures; and many others had been sold in different parts of the country.

Our Horse-hunter was a fine rider, of course, and a famous shot with the rifle. Heart and soul he loved the sport of the affair, the pursuit, and the capture; while he

found his profit in the hides, for which he obtained six shillings each, and the hair, which fetched ninepence per pound. He would set forth on an expedition with pack-horse laden with provisions and other camping-out necessaries, and attended by a mounted black boy or two. Marking and guiding himself by the tracks along the ridges, he would by-and-by espy the distant mob, consisting of from six to twenty animals, and dismount, to approach from tree to tree until within range. In the mob there is always a master, and sometimes there will be a second stallion, strictly kept in a subordinate position. The patriarch in times of danger takes the lead in the mad gallop for liberty ; but until things become serious, he is invariably found in the rear.

Our hunter prefers a range of 200 yards ; can sometimes, when cover is good, sneak to within half that distance ; but as often as not has to do his best at 300 yards. His weapon is a short Snider rifle, handy to carry slung over his shoulders when mounted. He has been known, getting two horses in a line, to send a bullet through both, and it is no uncommon thing for the second struck to fall at once, and for the first to gallop fifty yards before dropping. When sport is conducted under favourable conditions, he cautiously follows up the herd, riding by circuitous ways to the ridge where his judgment tells him the frightened animals have passed. On one or two occasions, when fortune has been very high, he has, in pursuing this policy, and by always keeping to leeward, been able to kill every member of the family. The attendant black-fellows skin the slain, and the hides are packed forthwith upon spare pack-horses. The Horse-hunter upon this particular Queensland station enjoys a kind of monopoly. He is not in the employment of the firm, but has the shooting on the understanding that he gives them ten per cent. of the horses captured alive ;

and they are only too glad to get the work done on these terms, because the brombies, in addition to their grass-devouring powers, are credited with seriously disturbing the stock.

The running-in of herds for taming is, as might be expected, a most exciting occupation, and the pace at which the operation is effected would give the red-deer men of Exmoor precisely the sensations they love. Considerable preparations are made beforehand. If possible, a bit of ground in a hollow, from which several spurs of range diverge, is selected for the trap-yard. From this a "lane" is formed about 300 yards in length, of strips of calico stretched from tree to tree, or of saplings and boughs, arranged to convert the "yard" into a *cul-de-sac*. The beaters are dispersed in several directions by their chief, and draw a cordon around the herd to be driven. The patriarchal horse soon scents danger from afar, and, cantering lightly around his wives and children, starts them in the direction where the coast seems clear; the shouts and whips of the beaters, nevertheless, artfully and surely heading them towards the funnel-shaped passage. One man is sufficient to put them at their mettle; the other beaters take the spurs of the mountains on either side, to prevent deviation from the desired course.

The "drive" generally means hard racing for ten or twelve miles, partly down stony ridges and precipitate gullies that no man would face unless his blood were up to fever heat and his horse well proven and sound in wind and limb. At the moment, on one of these occasions, I felt that I would have given worlds to have been able to follow such a chase. But I had spent too many years of my life in the roar of Temple Bar, and too keenly remembered the demands of family ties, to risk my neck in the glorious pursuit, which, after all, could only be indulged in by

thoroughly trained stock-riders. Wherefore, I wisely reined in, to the open disgust of my fretting mare, who like myself, listened to the receding thunder of the flying hoofs and the crashing of the timber, echoing up and down, until the whole was magnified into sounds resembling the headlong career of a fugitive host.

The herd—so thorough are the precautions taken—seldom gain the liberty they so gallantly seek. Their very speed is their doom. The horse is too high in character to craftily double or sneakingly run to earth. From the moment the patriarch swings to the head of his column, the line is straight and the headlong charge impetuous, let the obstacles be what they may. The dispositions of the beaters are too well chosen to admit of subsequent swerving, and before the herd are aware of the treachery intended they are charging down the last ridge, avoiding the white canvas on the trees, and on that account suddenly brought up in mad confusion, in the strongly stockaded *cul-de-sac*, across the mouth of which massive rails are quickly slipped by a man who has been lying in ambush for the purpose. The captured horses are at first frantic; they plunge and leap around their narrow bounds, horses, mares, colts, and fillies, squealing, biting, fighting, and kicking at the palings of massive logs nine feet high. The largest number ever run into the yard after this fashion was forty; but twelve is a fair average.

Having thus got the game in a trap, the question arises how to get them out. If they are very wild, they are left to their own reflections for a couple of days, to grow tame upon hunger. When the Horse-hunter deems it advisable to consummate his capture, he and his assistants lasso, throw, separate, and hobble the animal they select. It is surrounded by men who religiously keep at a non-kicking distance, and brought out—dragged out, if resistance is

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offered—into a group of quiet horses : decoys, colonially termed “coachers.” Mounted men are near, ready to ply the whip, and so, spite of struggle or anger, the helpless horse sooner or later makes a virtue of necessity, and succumbs, accompanying the coachers submissively to the head station yards. Sometimes a different plan is adopted. The selected bromby is fastened by a halter to a tame brother, and both are led away by a horseman. This operation must be performed with caution, for the plunging of the captive is apt to bring both horses to the dust, demanding of the horseman a quick eye, hand, and heel, and that most essential acquirement for a rider—the art of being thrown conveniently.

In a surprisingly short time these brombies are quite amenable to discipline, and it is not a little singular that they are, as a rule, broken with less difficulty than an ordinary thoroughbred. When skilfully broken they make, as in a subsequent chapter will be described, most useful servants. One evening I saw a man ride up to the head station, exchange a few words with the overseer, unsaddle, and turn his horse loose. It was not a big animal, nor a comely, but it shook itself, enjoyed the luxury of a roll in the grass, and, after another prolonged shivery shake, walked lightly down, whisking its tail, to the water-hole. Yet that hardy, grass-fed bromby had carried its rider seventy-six miles within the twelve hours, and seemed fit to do the journey again. Of course, a horse is not allowed to repeat such labour immediately, but the endurance of these unshod brombies is astonishing.

The term “wild” is employed with horses as with cattle in the colonies ; they are the progeny of once domesticated animals run wild. It is possible that the sire of this numerous race was still enjoying lordship and freedom in the mountains. About thirty years previous a sheep-owner in the

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district, there being no shearing to do, took it into his head to breed horses, and one of his entires, of high breed, got away, to gallop before long, perhaps, over the grave of his master, who was buried in the lonely ranges. The truant was a chestnut, and the majority of the brombies I saw—a hundred at least, wild and tame—were of that colour. The average height would be fifteen hands; but there were examples of all colours. The chestnut was a three-quarter Arab, and it should also be mentioned that he took a couple of thoroughbred colts with him. Others also must have escaped about the time of the stud-owner's death, for now and then a very old bromby was shot bearing the familiar brand of the stud. There were two or three veteran horses, supposed to be five-and-twenty years old, occasionally seen in distant ranges, but the majority shot were apparently of the third generation.

The brombies at first show a tendency to buck, though, when the training is not hurried, they are cured of that vice, which, in nine cases out of ten, is due to the stupidity of the trainer. The most rowdy horses on the station were certainly not brombies. The running-in process is not carried on without losses. The drives are often fatal to the favourite horses ridden by the hunters; many brombies gallop till they drop, and others die of broken hearts soon after their capture. In their state of freedom they are always in racing condition, and it is scarcely an extravagance to say that they gallop like the wind. Although 3000 hides had been in so short a space accounted for by my friend the Horse-hunter, the number of brombies then at large seemed rather to increase than diminish: the only effect of the slaughter was to drive them into the inaccessible ranges and upon other runs. Sometimes the brombies, amorously inclined, wander within four or five miles of the head station. At dewy dawn one morning, riding out to

an early drafting, I saw a magnificent brown stallion looking longingly over the fence of the breeding-mares' paddock, and the men told me that a week before he had leaped over, and, being chased, had leaped back again like a bird on the wing.

It was a perfect morning on which we started upon an expedition. The first laughing jackass was hailing the grey streaks in the east, as we strapped on our tin pannikins, put our cold beef, bread, tea, and ammunition into the saddle pouches, slung our rifles, and rode cheerily out of the home paddock. In five minutes we were in the forest, our horses' hoofs and legs wet with the dew they brushed at every step—all creation, as yet, silent. If at any time of the day the bush is awakened by melody, it is during the morning and evening hours; and soon, now, there was no lack of bird music, from the sweet fluting of the magpie to the discordant shriek of the gold-crested, high-flying cockatoos, bound for a foray amongst somebody's maize. The atmosphere was perfect as atmosphere upon this earth can be; the surroundings were endless vistas of refreshing green, shot with bars of gold, and toned with shadows which the fast-gathering sunbeams had not touched.

Up the ridges, along the crests, down into the valleys we ambled for a couple of hours, conversing in undertones, and looking for recent occupation. And it so happened that my eye discovered the first mob. We were by this time fairly in the mountains, and, rising to the crest of a ridge, I caught sight, in a verdant bottom 500 yards off, of a fine chestnut stallion, three mares, and two foals. With a "hist" to the Horse-hunter, I reined in; he did the same.

We quietly dismounted, armed, tied up the horses, and crept stealthily onwards. The wild horses, suspecting no harm, leisurely cropped the herbage. As we paused to reconnoitre, the sun struck athwart them and showed them

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to be a happy and handsome family, coats as sleek, manes and tails as fine, and hides as well filled as if they were under the care of a stud groom, and movements free and graceful as only those of the untamed can be. Stalking from tree to tree, and finally crawling on all-fours, we arrived to within a couple of hundred yards. There we found our last chance of concealment, and sighted accordingly. The Horse-hunter, with true courtesy, motioned me to take first shot, and I lost the opportunity—by reluctance proceeding from admiration of the victims. The finger was on the trigger, when one of the fillies began to graze her way to the sire, of whom she was a remarkable copy. The old fellow playfully nibbled at her, and the grand crest and outshaken tail revealed by the movement, together with the pretty coquetting of the little one to its dam, effectually caused the finger to relax, and the trigger to remain unpressed.

The Horse-hunter, very properly, was not to be so fooled, and he fired. The foals cantered to the farther side of the mares, the mares stood at attention, the sire paused, forefeet apart, erect, a model for an equestrian statue; looking surprised, and curiously turning to where the blue smoke curled amongst the trees. For a moment the happy family remained so motionless that they might have been photographed. All was changed with the crack of the second shot, which was not slow in coming. The little mob then took alarm, went away first at a trot, then at a swift, graceful hand-gallop, and were lost amongst the timber of the opposite ridge. The Horse-hunter afterwards declared that his anxiety to show me what he could do spoiled his aim. Of his ability with the rifle I had convincing personal evidence, but he had been out of practice for a couple of months, and we next day discovered that the cartridges he now tried for the first time did not suit the rifle. Two days

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later, he came in with six-and-twenty horse hides from his own gun.

In the course of the day we sighted a dozen mobs. The first was the smallest: the largest contained seventeen animals, old and young. Time after time the kangaroos spoiled the sport by bounding from us at the nick of time towards the horses we had by patient labour stalked. The latter must have long ago been familiarized with these uncouth marsupials; but the hop, skip, jump, and thud of the high-flyers always alarmed them, and if they did not at once decamp, they were kept enough on the alert to get the better of us. As the day advanced, we found that the horses had left the green glades, and were standing meditating in the ridges, generally upon an eminence from which they could receive prompt warning of an approaching intruder.

Our one success was the shooting of a small cobby sorrel mare. She was one of twelve, amongst which there were two horses—the chief, a massive upstanding bay fit for any warrior's charger; and the other, a compact, showy roan. The Horse-hunter's bullet, at long range, entered between the ribs, as she was moving at a walk nearer to her fellows. She gave a snort of pain, reared, and began to plunge. The bay and the roan, fright and anxiety visible in every action, trotted up, pawing, and sniffing the blood-dappled grass. Another shot was promptly fired at the roan, which was hit, as it seemed, in the shoulder, but not badly; and then the lot galloped at full speed out of range. The poor little mare lagged, however, behind in sore distress, and the rest, soon slackening speed, wheeled with tails streaming out and heads boldly up, and trotted back to their wounded companion. If ever dumb creatures expressed painful sympathy and hopeless bewilderment, that did they. They tried to urge on the mare, the big bay especially giving

her an encouraging lead, and, finding no response, always returning and circling round her.

It was with a feeling of relief that by-and-by, making a long détour to come down at the head of the mob, I espied the death-stricken mare standing trembling under a tree. Her companions had winded us as we descended the ravine, and made into the hills, where half a mile distant we could hear them neigh, and see them pause in close company, facing the spot where the sorrel trembled on.

Before we could carry out our merciful intention of putting her out of her misery, the bullet had finished its work. She sunk to her knees, and rolled over dead. She appeared when first I saw her under the hunter's aim, glossy, plump, and bright with strength ; during the twenty minutes which intervened between then and the final halt under the iron-bark she had apparently been transformed into another creature. Her coat had become rough, her tail and mane were drooping ; the arch was gone from the neck, the limbs were feeble, and her very flesh had shrunken. She presented the difference between a favourite one would love to fondle and cherish, and a miserable weed fit only for the knacker's shambles.

The Horse-hunter was much mortified at missing the roan, which he had known for four years past as a mischievous rogue that had once performed the wonderful feat of scrambling and leaping over the trap-yard fence, and had three times been the means of turning aside mobs that were thundering straight for the *cul-de-sac*. The big bay was also a notorious individual—a daring and artful freebooter, parading jauntily along the paddock fences to-day, giving the alarm here, there, and everywhere to-morrow, and at all times an impertinent meddler with legitimate sport. My guide was quite depressed at the results of his shooting, and before we remounted, gave a striking proof of his skill as a marksman.

A couple of kangaroos had been watching us, at a distance of two hundred and fifty measured paces. He aimed at one (the “old man”), which, probably by accident, though it seemed by design, simultaneously dropped to its forepaws. The sportsman whistled and shouted, “Now, then ; get up old boy !” and—this must have been a mere coincidence too—the kangaroo on the instant stood erect on its hind legs, and received the bullet clean in the centre of the chest, tumbling over very much dead. Still, the shooter refused to be comforted.

“Only to think,” he said, as we jogged up the next ridge, “that I once shot a score of horses without moving from a tree on this very ridge”—an exploit which I subsequently heard verified by an eye-witness. He had managed this by putting a common device of his own into practice ; had begun by crippling a mare, with the express purpose of keeping the troop near her.

My Horse-hunter, I found, enjoyed a high reputation in the country around for skill in catching and shooting wild horses and scalping kangaroos. He was the Nimrod of the district, gave his mind to the calling, and made it pay. The bromby nature he had closely studied, and knew its manners and customs. Of this I witnessed a curious incident. We had with difficulty stalked a mob of brombies, only to be annoyed by seeing that they were too far in an open glade for the rifle. Pausing at the last bit of cover, he whistled an imitation of a horse’s neigh so much like the original, that, looking another way at the time, I fancied it was one of our own animals. The brombies were, for the moment, deceived also ; the mob stood still, gazing wonderingly right and left, and the leader moved in a dignified manner a few steps towards us. Something then opened his eyes to the deception, for, without any apparent cause, he suddenly swerved round and took away his companions in furious stampede.

I learned from the Horse-hunter that when the patriarch of a mob is shot down the second stallion, if there is a second amongst them, screams, rushes at his once successful but now prostrate rival, and worries him, dog-like, with his teeth, as if the sudden remembrance of animosities and humiliations prompted him to add to the death-agonies of the chieftain whose will, during life, he dared not oppose. The hunter naturally takes advantage of this unseemly exhibition of rage, and lays the rivals side by side.

The kangaroos in the district had been very troublesome, and my companion in the hunt after brombies had made a good deal of money by scalp-hunting. After the passing of the Marsupials Destruction Act, a number of young fellows bought horses and equipments, and devoted themselves to shooting the universal pest. At first the local boards, acting under the statute, fixed the rate of pay at 8*d.* per scalp, and the price was remunerative to a good sportsman.

During the month previous to my visit, one of the partners who was the receiver for the locality accepted 3500 scalps, which, being counted and entered to the credit of the scalpers, were burnt according to custom. The time had, however, arrived when the necessity for destroying the kangaroos was not so great. The drought had driven them in during the previous years, but as the grass and water became abundant they had retired and spread over the country. The rate was thereupon reduced to 6*d.* per scalp, and this leaving little profit over expenses, most of the hunters had packed their baggage and left the district, as far as they cared, to its fate.

The head stockman on the station, one of the prettiest riders after stock I have seen, was however allowed the privilege of spending his spare time in scalp-hunting, and in six months he handed in scalps which were paid for to the extent of 140*l.* Living as he did on the spot, the entire

cost to him could not have been more than 40*l.* The rest was good pocket-money for a man of his class. The sport should go for something, moreover. There are no elements of danger or hairbreadth escapes, as with that romantic American scalp-hunting the accounts of which used to take away our boyish breath. You require a quiet horse used to the gun, and a piece that will hit hard and shoot straight ; and you must never forget to approach your game against the wind. Kangaroos have a knowing scent, and you had better remain at home if you neglect this precaution. Better the creatures saw than smelt you. In the one case they would probably stand and gaze inquiringly, until, all too late, they would have an end put to their inquiring for evermore ; in the other, they would be up and away, *not* leaving their tails behind them.

The best thing in scalp-hunting done by the Horse-hunter was in the winter before my visit : he went out at daylight, and returned an hour after dark with seventy empty cartridges and seventy-five scalps depending from his saddle-bow. It must not be overlooked that there is work as well as pleasure in this sport, which means continual mounting, loading, and cutting off the ears together with the strip of skin connecting them.

## CHAPTER IV.

## 'POSSUM-SHOOTING.

GAME of a description likely to tempt a good sportsman is not very plentiful on the Australian continent. A man equipped to the teeth, and able to engage in an expedition into unsettled districts, may happen to enjoy a run of fortune, and make bags of incredulous dimensions. The settler, however—the man who works hard, and yet would have his occasional recreation with the gun—has not a large variety of game to choose from ; but he can always fall back upon the innocent opossum, quite correctly described in the humorous phrase as a “’possum up a gum-tree.” Of all the marsupials on the great Australian continent, this is the species which is least frightened away by the habitations of men. The establishment of a township makes little difference to the opossum. On moonlight nights the popping of 'possum-shooting guns may be heard around the suburbs of even cities.

The destruction of the opossum is more justifiable than tame-pigeon shooting. Although the animal breeds but once a year, and rarely produces more than one at a birth, it is remarkably abundant in most of the settled districts. Having a *penchant* for green-stuff in its tender growths, it is, in fact, more plentiful than welcome. Gardening in the bush is achieved only through much tribulation ; droughts are bad enough, but the ravages of small marsupials are

especially aggravating. After the settler has, by dint of real sweat of the brow, succeeded in bringing his peas, lettuces, pumpkins, or vegetable marrows above ground, so that his wife and children may go out every evening to speculate upon the delectable prospect of fresh vegetables to relieve the regulation fare of salt beef and damper, it is disheartening indeed to find some morning that the little crop is being ruined by artful four-footed marauders with enormous appetites. The destruction of the 'possum is therefore, to begin with, an act of self-defence ; moreover, the skins are useful, if not valuable. Our Queensland variety were the common silver-grey, and not to be compared with the fine dark brown Tasmanian skins, a rug from which costs from seven to ten pounds. Still, the commoner kinds make good rugs, saddle-bags, and caps, and are soft to the foot by the bedside on the bare floor, often bare ground, of the ordinary settler's cabin.

The sport itself must count for something. Against the splendid freedom and fair prospects of his lot, the Australian emigrant who would succeed must set, among other things, downright hard manual labour, with few means of recreation. Who, then, would grudge him the amusement of a kangaroo-hunt, or the more easily obtained shot at a 'possum ?

The 'possum, if it had the opportunity, would decidedly dissent from the poet's dictum that night is the time to sleep. Its business, its pleasure, its love-making are done when others sleep. Should you want the 'possum in the daytime, you must imitate the example of the black fellow by examining the smooth trunks of the gum-tree, and having discovered scratches which experience soon enables you to understand, must shin your way upwards as best you can, and seek the slumbering animal in some cosy hollow at the head of the tree. After nightfall it descends to the herbage,

and in the silent bush its squeaky chatter is heard on every hand.

A dog is a necessary companion in 'possum-shooting. Poor old Major was the best dog for this work I ever knew. He was a grand Scotch deerhound, scarred with many a memory of kangaroo clutches, and a magnificent hunter. We allowed Major to work for us in perfect confidence. In the bush-cottage, where the hound was pet and companion, especially to the children, he would gravely wait prone on the ground whenever a nocturnal expedition was on foot, one eye on us as we drank our tea, the other eye on the guns in the corner. The wise fellow did not disturb himself when the meal was finished, but simply then watched our movements with both eyes; yet, directly we took up our guns he was up and ready. Not a word was necessary. He knew exactly the part he had to play.

In the immediate vicinity of the cottage he walked soberly at heel, expecting, as he always received, a word of love from his master; but in the open paddock he would pause, wag his tail, thrust his long nose into our hands, and of his own accord set off, nose to ground, at his huge loping stride. We could, sitting on a log, hear the crash of the dry sticks as he proceeded. Sometimes he would find game at once; sometimes not. That he would find, if there were anything to be found, we knew, and kept the watch of patience in the truly incomparable moonlight. Perhaps, when the time came, Major's bark would be heard in a direction altogether opposite to the point from which he started, showing what a semi-circle he had described. The barks were short and sharp. He never barked in that way except for 'possum finding, and he kept on repeating the signal until we were with him. It was the only sound in the vast solitude, and we were guided by it without difficulty.

Major would be found sitting on his haunches, looking with eager straightness up into the branches. A violent thumping of his tail on the grass, and an impatient whine, indicated his knowledge of our presence, but the head was never withdrawn from its perpendicular, nor did he utter another bark. So far he had performed his part, and it was now our turn. Often the 'possum could not be seen ; strain our eyes as we would from every side where we could get the object sharply outlined against the moonlight, nothing but leaves and branches could be detected. With other dogs we never wasted much time in a fruitless search. The continuous throwing back of the head and peering upwards wearied the eyes, and it was always possible that the dog had been misled by a flying fox or night-bird. But Major was not to be mistrusted, for we generally paid him the compliment of remaining, and generally found our 'possum at last.

A mature specimen weighs eight or ten pounds, and is larger than an ordinary house-cat. The treed 'possum was naturally in a state of alarm. It had been roaming on the ground when the dog approached, and although it looks the reverse of a racing animal, it had scampered at a swift pace, and scuttled out of harm's way up the gum-tree. There it lay, close to one of the stems of the bough. At the height of fifty or sixty yards it looked at first a small dark excrescence, but by shifting this way and that, now advancing, now retiring, but ever with his eye on the object, the sportsman would by-and-by see the large lynx-shaped ears. The rest is a primitive matter of potting. Shoot straight and the 'possum, in nine cases out of ten, falls immediately with a thud.

Here, again, Major's superiority was exemplified. The uneducated dog would rush at the fallen animal, and so maul it as to spoil the skin. Major, who had maintained

his watch, and, if possible, sharpened it during the act of shooting, was always on the spot to receive the 'possum, and make short work with it if it attempted to escape. Otherwise he stood solemnly gratified over it, mounting guard till released.

It may be here added, as a last reference to the dear old hound, that he went away into the mountains on a hunting expedition of his own, and never returned. His skeleton was found long after in a dried-up water-hole; and the presumption always was that he had surprised an "old man" kangaroo, pinned him according to his invariable custom, allowed himself to be hugged in the kangaroo's strong fore-arms, and drowned by him. This is not an uncommon habit of the kangaroo at bay.

The 'possum has a strong clinging tail, and occasionally dies with it curled round the branch upon which it received the shot. A pea-rifle is the best weapon for the sport when skins are the object. You can with it shoot at the head, and make one hole only. Few settlers, however, possess a fancy gun of this description. A rusty single-barrel, often of the vilest Brummagem make, has to suffice, with a charge of No. 4 shot shovelled out of the trousers pocket in a pipe-bowl. One of my colonial bush friends used to carry his powder loose in a jacket pocket, and scoop it out in the same fashion, smoking merrily all the while. A youngster in the bush is very careless with firearms, but, however rude his gun may be, he can shoot his eight or ten 'possums during a favourable ramble. The skin should be left till next morning, because the fur comes out at the slightest touch while the animal is warm.

The young opossum, which often crawls (none the worse for the headlong fall) out of the pouch of the dead mother, makes an interesting pet. It quickly becomes tame, and will run over the house in a mood of happy content. The

'possum is a pretty animal. The face is round, the nose sharp, and the eyes soft and bright. The tail is black and long, but underneath it is hairless and flat, as befits its prehensile purposes. The front teeth are long, and a wounded opossum will inflict a severe bite, and use its large, sharp claws with severe effect. Only when absolutely pressed for food will the white bushman eat the flesh. The young animals are said to be passable eating. Dogs, however, do not object to the meat, highly flavoured as it may be with gum-leaf. The aboriginal native regards the flesh as his staple diet, and the little black fellow's first lesson in hunting is to overreach this wily marsupial. No refinements of cookery or temptations of savoury sauce are lavished on the black fellow's game. He stalks up to the camp-fire, the 'possum swinging by the tail, and casts it as it is on the embers. When half cooked it is torn to pieces by the hand and worried by the teeth of the hungry and degraded aboriginal.

## CHAPTER V.

## THE DUGONG.

My first glimpse of the dugong (*Halicore australis*) in its native element was from the deck of a yacht. The little *Fairy* had been riding uneasily during the night, chafing at her hawser like an impatient horse fretting under restraint. Towards morning the wind dropped, and the cessation of the creaking and thumping of course awakened one as effectually as if the change had been from quiet to noise, instead of from noise to quiet. The wooded islands of Moreton Bay were around us, slowly, in the hastening dawn, putting aside their vestments of faint blue gauze. The magnificent constellations of the southern heavens were visible, but so faded and feeble that they seemed but the vanishing ghosts of themselves. The ripple of the flood tide, parting at the bows of the yacht, and streaming with a contented gurgle along her copper sides, was the only sound.

This was the situation when I emerged from the shelter of the mainsail, arranged tentwise over the boom, and stood on deck to watch the sun rise. In those latitudes this is a very rapid process. The sea-fowl, instinctively feeling and obeying the summons, blithe in the half-born morning, flew straight from one island to another, not wheeling and vagrant as they would be later in the day, but pursuing a strictly business-like course. The water, lazily heaving its

unruffled bosom, seemed to be snatching an hour of rest in anticipation of the land-breezes that would soon of a certainty disturb its composure. The eastern sky assumed one by one the manifold hues of the ever-wondrous transformation, catching the first stare of the sun while as yet he was below our horizon, and blushing rose-pink in consequence. And then would swiftly come the first appearance of the golden rim over the dark ridge-line of the far-off range.

Yet I after all missed that looked-for vision, for, not a cable's length astern, there rose from the sea a plaintive appeal, as if a child half awakened had softly moaned, and turned over to sleep again. I looked around in time to see a clumsy greyish-brown head silently thrust above the surface, and, without leaving a sign, as silently disappear. This was a dugong taking a breath of upper air, and returning to its feeding-ground below. While I watched in the vain hopes of another glimpse, the sun had leaped clear of the hills, and all the delicate tints of dawn had died.

If, however, it was not possible to see more of the dugong alive and free in its native element, there was an excellent opportunity of looking upon its carcass, and prying into its interior mechanism. Not two leagues off lay Stradbroke Island, and, white in the sunshine, we could make out Amity Point, its huts and its signal-posts. Amity Point was the headquarters of a dugong fishery, and the boats anchored off shore indicated that the men had returned from their night's labour. Our own hand-line angling was over by breakfast-time, and the tide set in the right direction.

Up, then, with the anchor; haul-ho at the halyards, and let the sails take their fill of the wind, travelling in strong cat's-paw line towards us. Within an hour we had compassed our two leagues. The brown kites, big hawks,

and impudent crows soaring and settling on the beach in increasing force informed us that the men had not returned that morning without a prize ; and when we stepped out of the dingy upon the hard surf-varnished sand, we found two carcasses of dugong already skinned and stripped of their flesh, and one specimen, estimated to weigh close upon half a ton, lying high and by this time dry, awaiting chopper and knife.

Now I could understand why one person had told me the dugong was like a whale ; another, that it resembled a seal ; a third, that it was not unlike a porpoise. The animal was in some sense a reminder of them all, but really not to be compared with either. It was perhaps likest a seal of elephantine proportions ; and a baby dugong that had been taken from one of the prizes over which the carrion-birds were fighting and squabbling, and that had been kept for despatch in spirits to England, would very well pass for a member of the seal family.

A tour round the mature specimen had to be twice repeated before I could see my way to a clear comprehension of its "points." Its dull brown body was like a large cylinder, tapering off towards the head and great paddle-shaped tail. Ears there were none to speak of. The eyes were tiny and three parts buried. The two flippers, considering the size of the animal, were remarkably small. The most prominent feature was the head, which terminated in a solid square-cut upper lip that warranted its comparison with a bullock. Being a female dugong, there were neither teeth nor tusks in the upper jaw, but a couple of small tusks of good ivory had been that morning taken from one of the bulls already operated upon. The inside of the mouth was lined with a rough apparatus, like a worn-down scrubbing-brush. The dugong, in short, is a vegetarian of the strictest order, and the stomach of our dead friend

contained an immense quantity of vegetation cropped during the night from the bottom of the sea. It was the most curious example of the ruminating mammal I had ever seen. The skin was bare and slightly wrinkled, though at a distance it appeared to be quite smooth.

When the dugong was hauled up on the sandy slope, a line was cut down the belly and the hide taken off in one piece, and spread out to be used as a receptacle for the meat as it was hewn from the carcass. As it happened to be a fair-sized skin, it required two men to carry it. We were afterwards shown a hide that was an inch and a half thick at the back, though the thickness gradually diminished towards the under part of the body.

The dugong hide, though it is in high demand for machine bands, is not, as might be supposed from its solidity, composed of gross material, for its delicate nature is such that, properly boiled down, it yields a jelly as acceptable and beneficial to invalids as calf's-foot. The gentlemen who conducted us over the dépôt at Stradbroke Island had boundless faith in the dugong hide, and believed that, reduced by machinery, it would make excellent leather for general purposes.

The flesh of the dugong next claimed our attention. It is cut off the carcass in flitches and slabs, and from the same animal is taken meat resembling beef, veal, and bacon. I have eaten it in each form, and can testify to its excellence, and to the way in which it has been palmed off upon knowing men as prime fillets of beef, cutlets of veal, and rashers of superior bacon. If the dugong is not properly fat, it is turned chiefly into bacon; should it, however, present a layer nearly two inches thick, the snow-white fat is used for a more important purpose, to be presently described. The lean flesh, beef-like in the mature, and veal-like in the young animals, is eaten fresh or salted for food. The

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bacon fitch in size, colour, and streakiness, if hung in an English pork-butcher's shop, might easily be taken for a section of the side of a true Wiltshire hog; and the only difference observable in the eating would be, in the dugong, an absence of the strong flavour, too often found in the pork.

And a mature dugong, twelve feet long or thereabouts, would weigh nearly a ton. It is worthy of mention, too, before passing from the flesh of this animal, that the meat from the calf is always the best, and that it is recommended by the faculty to consumptive persons, by reason of its undoubted strengthening qualities. From the dugong's head the fishermen get their own quickly secured tit-bit in a happy blending of fat and lean with the gelatinous portions; which, carefully cooked, becomes, when cold, a delicious ready-made brawn. The flippers, a good deal boiled, make capital soup. The bones of the dugong, being of great density, close-grained, and capable of taking a high polish, might probably be used in substitution for ivory. The ivory tusks are in much request for knife-handles.

To this catalogue of practical uses must now be added the most valuable of them all, namely, the production of oil. Australia at the present time absorbs nearly all the dugong oil that is manufactured; but it is idle to suppose that either the capabilities of the Queensland waters for supplying the dugong, or the utilization of the creature when captured, have been thoroughly tested: the supply is never abreast of the demand. Little is known of the habits of the dugong: the exact range of its habitat has not been defined. But the value of dugong oil is established beyond doubt. To Dr. Hobbs, an esteemed and long-resident public man in Brisbane, belongs the credit of the discovery; and his early description of the therapeutic qualities of the oil, based upon experiments with his

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own patients, remains not only unquestioned, but confirmed by the experience of five-and-twenty years. It possesses all the medicinal qualities of cod-liver oil, without the unpleasant taste of that familiar curative. In its pure state it can be taken without disagreeing with the most sensitive stomach. I have myself used it instead of butter with toast ; have eaten delicate pastry made from dugong lard ; have fried fish with it ; and, as a consequence, have never since ceased to wonder that some better effort is not attempted to make it more widely known.

Consumption, the scourge of the old country, finds an unfriendly atmosphere in Queensland, where I have known consumptives, landing with the disease to all appearance hopelessly advanced, become in a few years, healthy if not robust. Yet, even there, the most marvellous effects are attributed to dugong oil in cases of rheumatism, and wasting as well as ordinary consumption. I met with a well-authenticated instance of a man who was unable to take medicine or nourishment, kept alive by an outward application of the lard sediment of dugong oil. It was rubbed constantly into the skin, and lard plasters were kept on the pit of the stomach, until the patient was able to take the oil in the ordinary manner, and rejoice in ultimate recovery. And I have known ladies who shuddered at the bare notion of swallowing oil, derive benefits from its adaptation to all manner of culinary purposes.

The process of extracting the oil at Stradbroke Island was, I presume, that followed in the few stations engaged in it. If the dugong, as explained on a previous page, offered enough fatty inducement, the bacon was boiled down, and the oil run off through a tap, or removed by the more homely device of skimming. It should be quite clear, positively flavourless, and without odour ; but this combination of qualities, which distinguishes it from cod-liver

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oil, can only be attained by the nicest "rendering." The largest quantity can be made by "trying out," which is, roughly speaking, frying in a Brobdingnagian kettle. In this way, however, the quality suffers; and thus, though boiling involves more waste, that is found to be the best—and in the long run, therefore, most remunerative—system. In cooling, a careful filtration through flannel bags is observed, and the sediment is the white lard to which reference has been made. The yield from an average dugong would be about five gallons; and the minimum may be set down at three, and the maximum at ten gallons.

The proprietors of the Stradbroke fishery were at the time of my visit mourning over the decline of prosperity, and longing once more for the time when half a dozen dugongs would be brought to land in one morning. The herds appeared to be abandoning the waters, and it was a question whether the men should not follow their example. A similar state of things was being deplored in other waters, where the author of "The Queen of the Colonies," a dugong-hunter himself, once saw a herd escaping in an unbroken procession for three hours through a narrow tide-way to the open sea.

Moreton Bay is the southernmost limit of the dugong haunts in the Queensland seas. The season there lasts through the lovely winter weather, and it is supposed that the dugongs make their way thither from more tropical seas to give birth to their young. The submarine pastures upon which they feed lie at a depth of from eight to fourteen feet, and the favourite grounds are banks protected from the ocean, in bays and straits. They graze in company, and feed down the herbage so close that they leave a well-defined track to indicate their movements. The black fellows, who love occupation of this kind, if any, peer over the gunwale of the whale-boat into the clear water, and are unerring

authorities, telling at once when the monsters passed that way, though it were a week previously, and giving a shrewd guess as to their present whereabouts. Their eyesight is almost miraculous.

The recently captured specimens we saw at Stradbroke had been tracked in this way. On the morning before our arrival one of the proprietors, a well-educated and handsome young Englishman, who looked the gentleman through all his rude fisherman's equipment, sailed away with his crew of aborigines in open boat, and found encouraging traces of a small herd of these bullocks of the sea. The sail was taken down and strict silence kept, the dugong-hunters surmising that the game was not far distant. In that case, as the dugong has to come to the surface at short intervals to "blow," there would be an outward and visible token before long. This actually happened, and when the wind dropped and the ripples fell, one of the blacks caught sight of a dugong leisurely prowling about, deep down upon the bottom.

Then stealthily the boat returned to shore, and towards evening put off again to place the strong nets, made of rope with 14-inch mesh, in a position to entangle the dugongs when during the night they came in from the sea, according to custom, to feed up the richly weeded submarine bank near shore. The upper part of the net was buoyed by logs of wood, the bottom was heavily leaded, and the whole attached to two anchors, one weighing 75 lbs., the other 90 lbs. Sometimes the struggles of the captives are rewarded by a dragging away of both anchors and nets, but on this occasion there was no such ill-luck. The net, in position, presented a wall fourteen feet high, and 150 yards long, and it was placed straight athwart the tide. What happened may be safely conjectured.

The dugong, in happy innocence, ate greedily of the succulent sea growths, cleaving its way in the most work-

manlike manner, but it was suddenly stopped by a strange barrier into which it had somehow thrust its bovine snout. Being a remarkably timid creature, it took fright, lost what in such creatures is tantamount to presence of mind, struggled hard, and got hopelessly entangled.

Now and then a dugong is found wrapped round as with the folds of a hammock, and the net has to be cut away piecemeal. As often as not, the dugongs thus drown themselves by frantic efforts to escape ; but when a partial entanglement permits them to follow their instinct and come to the surface, they are taken alive. In the morning the boat cruises round to see how the nets have fared and to secure the game. The dead dugong is subjected to the indignity of having a slit cut through its nose, and a rope inserted through the nostrils, wherewith to tow it ashore—a very easy contrivance, to which the shape of the object readily accommodates itself. The dugongs that are found alive in their captivity struggle desperately. As a rule, they are as harmless as vegetarians are usually supposed to be, the only known breakers of the peace being a couple of bulls fighting over a sweetheart, or a frantic mother maddened by danger to her offspring. Nevertheless, although the dugong is by nature mild-mannered, and innocent of the arts by which a Greenland whale sends a boat spinning in the air with all hands, the men prefer to give the netted individual a wide berth. Nor would it be the correct thing to slaughter it on the ground, lest the blood should attract a legion of sanguinary sharks, whose attacks would cause a speedy loss of the booty. The dugong, still floundering, is therefore hauled ashore, and a long knife, applied to the throat, puts an end to its career.

In the early days of the fishery the dugong was taken by the more exciting method of harpooning, and on the Wide Bay grounds, farther north, the system yet partially obtained

for the sake of the sport. The blacks are very fond of this, and prove wonderfully expert in finding and striking the dugong. The extreme shyness of the beast adds to the difficulty, while it gives zest to the pursuit ; and woe betide the native who dares to utter a sound, or handle clumsily the muffled oars, while the harpooner stands like a black statue in the bows, directing, by a movement imperceptible to other than savage eyes, the course to be taken. Unerring as to time and force is the harpoon, and away rushes the boat, dragged by the swift-moving dugong along a crimson track. The pace slackens all in good time, and rarely does the victim escape. This is a modified form of whaling ; but as the practice drives away the dugong, it has been dis- countenanced by every possible means.

In waters like these, inhabited by divers creatures unknown in temperate climes, the dugong-hunter sometimes meets with strange net-fellows. In our passage across the bay on the previous evening the falling wind prevented the yacht reaching her anchorage before dusk, and the boys were deputed to keep on sounding. The lead, hurled well ahead, at one cast rattled on what sounded like the lid of a coffin, but what was in reality the convex armour-plate of a gigantic turtle, that no doubt went down as much alarmed as the youth, who fancied that we were running dead upon the rocks. The turtle, however, is a harmless intruder. Five days ago our Stradbroke friends found in the nets the makings of a fine dugong, one-third of which had been eaten by sharks. They must have attacked the carcass in a swarm, each retiring with a mouthful, and charging anew for another.

The water was in perpetual swirl when the boat approached, and the sharks cruised around, and eagerly followed the remnant as it was being towed ashore. One shark, bolder than his comrades, was not to be frightened, and a black fellow, entering into the spirit of the game, took the shark-

hook and chain out of the locker, put on a bait, and cast it forth. The shark took it instantly, was firmly hooked, and towed ashore alongside the mutilated dugong. Its liver was said to weigh 95 lbs., and to have produced five gallons of oil, which was sold for lubricating machinery. Ninety-five pounds strikes one as a tolerable weight for one set of liver, but that was the assertion made and sworn to by witnesses. The curing-houses at Stradbroke were ornamented high and low with such curiosities as saw-fish and stinging rays, and there was a stuffed hammer-headed shark that had been taken out of the dugong nets, thirteen feet long, and three feet six inches across the head.

The oil-makers who have taken up the trade have done their best, and worked hard, but they have not gone far enough. A standing dépôt on shore will not suffice. The dugong travels along the coast, and should be followed into tropical seas, amongst the islands recently acquired by the Queensland Government, and, if necessary, even to dangerous New Guinea. What is required is a brig or schooner fitted up on whaling principles, carrying experts who will make themselves acquainted with the best methods of extracting oil, and, for seamen and operators, picked men having a pecuniary interest in the success of the experiment.

It would be easy to set up a portable boiling apparatus on shore, where wood for firing is ready to hand. There is now regular communication from Thursday Island, along the entire eastern coast of Queensland, one of whose ports should be fixed upon as headquarters. Experience proves that the dugong will not come to the stations on shore, but is, on the contrary, apt to desert once favoured haunts. The hunter, therefore, must go to the dugong.

The dugong is stated to be plentiful through the Malayan archipelago, but there would be no necessity to work so far away from civilization, at least until the Queensland waters

were exhausted. If buoyant young men, seeking an outlet for superfluous energy, and willing to embark a little capital in an enterprise that offers legitimate roving, spiced with a moderate amount of excitement, will make inquiries and procure reliable data upon this subject, I believe they will find it worth consideration. The adventurers in a dugong cruiser, well ordered and soundly appointed, would be men to be envied, even if the scheme were not crowned with brilliant immediate success.

## CHAPTER VI.

## AMONG THE SUGAR-CANES.

WE had some passengers on board the *Egmont*, bound from Brisbane to the northern ports of the Colony, with whom I soon made friends after my custom. Imprimis, a couple of dogs chained up in the fore part of the ship; a nondescript, said to be a colley and of high repute with cattle, and a small black and tan. The bigger dog, as usual, took his troubles philosophically, and surveyed the surroundings, let them be rough or smooth, with big brown eyes that could not probably be other than placid. The toy dog, used, no doubt, to endless petting, yelped and pulled at his chain night and day, troubled at the absence of his young mistress, who lay very sick, with a pillow supporting her weary head, on one of the saloon skylights. Deserted by their owners, these passengers hailed my approach three or four times a day with boisterous delight.

A couple of swans in a gigantic coop would return no demonstration of friendship, though, puzzled as they must have been under such circumstances, they suffered one to touch them. There were probably not a dozen white swans in all Queensland, and the novel appearance of these strangers was abundantly proved by the curiosity of a family of colonial boys and girls who now for the first time saw the birds which had previously existed for them in

picture-books only. These swans on the second night were deposited at Rockhampton safely, and the circumstance was thought worthy of special articles in the morning newspapers, welcoming them to the public gardens, and thanking the curator of the same for procuring them in Sydney and bringing them through so long a voyage successfully.

On the lower deck I found other friends in three blood-horses and a couple of hacks, bred on the Clarence River, New South Wales, and destined for a northern station. Horses, even if they are not sea-sick, never seem to enjoy a sea voyage ; these were remarkably meek, if not depressed. The young stud horse had life enough left to nibble feebly at the tarpaulin manger under his nose, but he and his companions in misery had left their food untouched, and looked wofully like roysterers on the morrow of a hot revel. I think these fellow-voyagers are worthy of introduction here as living examples of the determination of the colonists, by extending the useful hand in hand with the beautiful, to make their adopted home, so far as in them lies, a copy of the old country.

On shore it had been hot. It was nearing the end of October, and summer had set in early, with promise of roasting weather, though shortly afterwards it changed its mind, and left a season of coolness—the more enjoyable because it was out of all rule. At sea it was pleasant as yachting in the Solent in June, when the sky is blue and the wind westerly. Along the shore, appearing as a hedge of clouds to the far left, as we headed north, the fiery serpents of heavy thunderstorms were playing for two days, but the ocean and the islands out at sea were sunny and calm. It was an undesirable termination of such a voyage to arrive at Flat Top Island at two in the morning, and be transferred to a small tender, upon whose dewy decks we had to pass

five hours under the glare of the moonlight which rendered caution in sleep necessary. The tide came at last, and then we steamed up the Pioneer river to the port of Mackay, the metropolis of the sugar district.

Upon the adjacent sugar-plantations life is infinitely more enjoyable than in the town, and I could almost have fancied that a latent jealousy which I detected in the towns-people towards the planters had something to do with this state of things. Be that as it may, the planters know how to reduce the discomforts of tropical life to a minimum, and in matters of comfort, and even luxury, are excelled by none and equalled by few classes in the colony.

It seemed strange for a time not to hear the ordinary conversation of Australian country life, and to be in an atmosphere where there was not the remotest flavour of sheep and cattle. People as a rule talk of the things by which they live ; and just as there is iron in the speech and thought of the Black country, cotton at Manchester, and coal at Barnsley, you may safely reckon upon finding in hotel, coach, and steamboat, in any of the Australian colonies, that hides, tallow, and wool come continually uppermost. Here I experienced a decided exception. The talk centered around Java and Bourbon cane, centrifugals, juice, crushings, and the latest ruling prices in the London markets ; and very soon I was as strongly impregnated with the saccharine odour as my immediate fellows. There was this notable difference between the squatters and sugar planters—the former at that period were bewailing the ruinously low prices of stock, while the latter were rejoicing in magnificent yields of cane just when the market was high and rising. The misfortunes of the Mauritius planters saddened none of the Mackay growers, so far as I could detect ; it was their opportunity, and they were not slow in making the most of it.

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One of the loveliest gardens I had seen in Queensland surrounded the house of my bachelor host, who was member for the electorate, and the gardener, anticipating his first appearance after the close of the session, had newly mown the grass and removed every weed from the beds. The richly flowering tropical shrubs were at their best; the English flowers, especially the verbenas and geraniums, were in full bloom; the recent showers had freshened everything that was green. From the creeper-screened verandah the mill was visible, and the merry laughter and shouting of the "boys"—Kanakas—intermingled musically with the noise of the machinery and the whistle of the engine. An unmistakable air of bustle, prosperity, and content characterized the first glimpse of plantation life. There were more human figures in the outlook than can be seen in other phases of colonial industry, and although they were the dark coffee-coloured figures of nearly nude South Sea Islanders, the picture would not have been half so bright without them.

The Kanakas seemed to swarm in and around the mill. Their costume was simply and easily adjusted, being nothing but a scanty loin-cloth. It was so scanty and so tightly stowed away, that until you were at close quarters the men seemed to be in a state of nature. Their sleek bodies glistened with a warm coppery tint, and they worked under the blazing sun with no other head-covering than their woolly pates. As for condition, they were models of fulness and firmness of flesh, and some of them quite ran to aldermanic proportions in the article of paunch. As a rule, the Polynesians are small, but I noticed some half-dozen upon the plantation splendidly proportioned, and displaying ropes of magnificent muscle. The women—there were three—wore a gown of gaily patterned print, and they worked steadily at some of the lighter forms of labour. In the

fields, and upon the heaps of refuse in the yard, the Kanakas chatted gaily as they worked, but at their stations in the mill the business went on without a word and without a hitch. Carts, drawn by stout horses, came from divers directions with loads of newly-cut cane, and the drivers were invariably "boys;" and "boys" still would meet the eye in every nook and corner.

The sugar plantation is a pretty and homely object of the scenery. The mills, with their lofty chimney-stacks, are generally on the banks of a river whose dense scrub has been cleared. At a distance the crops display the lovely tints of a young corn-field, and the narrow paths give an air of occupation and industry which at once strikes the eye accustomed to the open forest or half-cleared farms. The plantation crops are always green and, whether in the form of ratoons or fully grown cane, are delightful to look upon. The carts were shooting out their loads of cane fresh from the plantation as we arrived on a visit of inspection.

Like the New Testament examples, the sugar-planters always seem to be seeking some new thing, so that upon one plantation the system adopted may be different from that of another. The speciality of the mills through the important portions of which I have conducted the reader was purification by charcoal. Other mills purified by boiling. Whether it was because of the charcoal I know not, but no one could deny that *my* mill produced a sugar that had never been beaten. The proprietor certainly had to pay for his fancy. The process of making charcoal was a manufacture in itself, and demanded its own premises. There I found a huge heap of calcined bones, retaining their original shape; a handmill to grind them in; a winnowing machine to separate dust from the true charcoal; and upon the wooden partitions there were some bold chalk

drawings of South Sea Island war-canoes and birds and beasts, and a good-humoured caricature of the manager of the plantation, all sketched in leisure moments by the light-hearted Polynesian. In one of the war-canoes the steering man was putting "the thumb of derision to the nose of contempt"—proof that the artist had not lived for nought in an English colony.

It was always interesting to stroll through and around the mills. Had I been a dentist, the pain, however, would have been too severe, for when the "boys" got to know me as an appanage of the proprietor, or manager, whom they regarded as a friend, they would show a set of ivories that would be the envy and despair of a professor of the dental art. I learned to like their merry, simple ways, and to see nothing incongruous in their uncovered skins, ranging from light coffee colour to black, according to their islands; whether going to and fro with burdens, wielding the vessels, tending the fires, or driving the horses, they were always quiet, plodding, and contented. The only puzzle was that these "boys," who in their own country bask in the sun and allow such food as their women do not bring them to drop into their mouths, should voluntarily enter into temporary servitude, and at once become amenable to discipline.

The face of the country had been entirely changed by the sugar cultivation. We rode through the rustling cane to eminences overlooking as fair a view as the eye could desire. From one of them we could count ten mills peeping above the tree-tops, each probably belonging to a plantation averaging 1000 acres in extent. Interspersed amongst the level living green of the cane were clumps of scrub, and the never-fading tropical foliage along the river banks. It was veritably a sea of bright verdure, whose waves were very palpable, albeit they were but waves of shadow playing and passing. Twenty square miles of this most level cultivation,

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in brightest array, were below and around us. Very literally there was here scattered

Plenty o'er a smiling land.

Scenery more romantic and majestic I have often seen, but never a fairer scene of peaceful plenty as we sat in our saddles upon the hill-top and looked over the planter's paradise, enclosed with its semicircular rampart of mountains. Now it was apparent why this was the sugar-growing district *par excellence*. The rainfall is certain in its season, and the mountains distribute a proper proportion over the basin, which faces the quarter out of which the welcome south-east trade-winds blow. It can count with certainty upon warm tropical rains in January, February, and March, and upon being relieved in the dry months by showers born of the mountain barrier. Frost, the sugar-grower's worst enemy, next to a falling market, is unknown.

There is plenty of work to do upon a plantation at other times besides crushing. As soon as this, the busy season, is over, say at Christmas, the young cane, or ratoons, must be cleaned, and the next year's crop must be generally looked after. There will be land to plough and prepare; perhaps new ground cleared for addition to the plantation. From March to July canes are planted, and by that time crushing is once more approaching. All the year through the weeds have to be kept down, if the planter would maintain his repute and get the most out of his cane.

Planters' hospitality is as famous in Queensland as in the West Indies, and being generally men of education, and having under any circumstances an unstinted supply of labourers, they surround themselves with more of the luxuries of life than the general run of colonists. The boys are quiet and handy fellows in a house, and there is no need for the pressure of the domestic-servant curse on

a sugar plantation. The planters are, from one cause and another, considered by their brother colonists "good form," and men who are not required to rough it, as are people dwelling in the bush. They live near each other, as a rule, and can cultivate the graces of society, while the semi-tropical or tropical scrub scenery around the plantations has always a richness and attractiveness of its own.

Sugar alone, let me now observe, would not have tempted me to Mackay, backed though it was by the warm hospitality of my friend and host. I had been among the sugar-canies before, and could at any time reach a plantation within the compass of a day's ride from Brisbane. There was a more potent attraction to lure me on a voyage of 600 miles. That attraction was indicated in one little word on a previous page—the word "sport." In truth, I had heard that, far away north, leagues above the tropic of Capricorn, there was a big fish named the palmer, which rose fitfully at a large hackle, and was probably named palmer in consequence. This unknown fish I had kept in remembrance, and at length I determined to make its acquaintance.

What tackle I had went with me in the *Egmont*, and I begged or borrowed from acquaintances, who haply had preserved them, four or five salmon flies, which I thought might be serviceable. My friend and host, who had told me about the palmer three years before, and every year renewed his invitation to me to try it, was no angler. But he had seen the fish, and had assured me on the word of a gentleman, a bachelor, a member of Parliament, an Oxford man, and ever so much more, that I should find some sport. But unfortunately he gave me no details. He could tell me how to race abreast of a buffalo and pistol him on the prairie; he had graduated with honour amongst prairie hens and canvas-back ducks, but he was, to my thinking, shamefully ignorant of angling. Consequently, I

soon discovered that I was very ill prepared indeed; as the reader will admit, in a few moments.

The Pioneer river ran by the end of the garden, and, though only four miles from the port of Mackay, had thus soon put off its sea-going dress. It no longer looked the approach to an estuary, but a rippling stream with clear banks, and gently-sloping shores of sand. Once or twice before venturing forth I had seen Kanakas returning from angling expeditions with strings of miscellaneous fish, and had noticed fish moving in the water when the tide was rising. These, however, were the whiting, bream, and flatheads, to be found in all tidal rivers. Four miles farther up there was no tide perceptible. Rocks abounded in the bed of the stream, and picturesquely broke its current.

And now it became a really beautiful river. Instead of slimy foreshores, and mangroves thickly sprouting out of them; instead of muddy tide and monotonous current, there were gloomy pools overhung with rocks, garnished with reeds, adorned with lilies, and ruffled by wild duck; or clear, rushing streams, eddying and roaring over stony ledges, and gliding and spreading with foamy grace in their impetuous escape. Where trees grew, glossy tropical foliage hung in festoons from the branches and interlaced tree with tree; where trees had grown, but had fallen beneath the axe, flowering shrubs and scrub undergrowth covered the ground, and above them rose the long, elegant, pale-green leaves of bananas, planted by the Kanakas of the neighbouring plantations for their own delectation, in groves of their own, on Sundays and other off-days. In some of its best reaches the river possessed all the inspiriting, eye-satisfying, ear-delighting characteristics of a home salmon stream, with the added wealth of tropical vegetation. The Pioneer, in a word, was a revelation to me—a different type of river from any I had seen in Queensland.

The sun was too bright and hot for angling at any other times than morning and evening, and the first visit was one of my numerous disappointments. My two companions, the one a planter, the other a squatter, two old College companions, and both kindness itself, had brought their rifles in the hope of shooting an alligator. The pools appeared more dark and gloomy than they actually were when I knew that they were the haunt of this hideous reptile, and the repeated warning to take care that I did not mistake a rock for one of them added to the excitement, for I had that day seen a horse whose flayed hind-quarters bore livid testimony to the need for warning.

My old English fly-rod was quite useless here. Favourite traces and flies at last were found wanting. Three times in succession the gut, rotten by previous use, but more by disuse in a warm climate, parted, when a fish took the white moth with which I had made a beginning. A small artificial minnow was then rigged up upon a general rod, but without swivels what could be done? Certainly, not much.

Still, there were two brace of fish to show. They were called herring, but had nothing of the herring in their character. They were about eighteen inches long, with large mouth and decided teeth, thin of body, greenish on the back and silvery underneath, and more like some descriptions of gar-fish than herring. They gave excellent sport, and took a fly greedily. Sometimes they may be caught in any quantity. One of my four was taken with a gaudy salmon fly. The fish were well on the feed as evening approached, but before long every scrap of tackle that would hold a fish had ignominiously given way. This, to a real angler, I am aware, will sound like an admission of unparalleled weakness and stupidity. As my companions reminded me, as we drove along the sandy track, home-wards, a true sportsman should—especially in fresh fields

and waters new—be prepared for any emergency. I could urge nothing in defence, but pretended to be much interested in the reflection of the plantation fires in the sky.

The next day was for a wonder grey, and eventually wet; one of those warm muggy days fatal to fish. Fortunately my despair was not of long duration. The owner of the Alexandra plantation was a true sportsman, learned in all branches of angling, and when I modestly told him of my predicament, and asked him to lend me an old tracing, and a spinning bait, if he had one, he placed his whole armoury at my disposal. Had I been at Speyside, I could not have been better supplied. He furnished me with a peerless eighteen-foot spinning rod and winch, treble gut tracings with brass swivels, and four phantom minnows of the largest size, the precise equipment I had the night before decided I should have brought. Moreover, he directed me to the likeliest spots, at one of which he had cut down a tree that interfered with a fair cast into a boil at the foot of a small fall.

From the top of a flattish boulder jutting out at a point where the river was split into three parts, and the torrents fretted and roared all day long, and where I could command every description of water, I kept at work for two hours; hours of abandonment to successful sport that compensate for a hundred blanks. It was a pleasure to use the long perfectly-balanced rod, and hear the whirr of the big bronze winch; and pleasure even higher to feel the savage plunge of the palmer, as it learned that the nicely spinning phantom, so like a delicate gudgeon working its way upstream, was a delusion and a snare. At this spot I killed seven fish, the largest  $8\frac{1}{2}$  lbs., the smallest 4 lbs. It would have been agreeable to meet with one of the eighteen and twenty-pounders that are occasionally taken, but I was satisfied, knowing that the season was not far enough ad-

vanced for really good sport, and that the water was very low.

My good friends had looked on with patience and content, my host pleased that he had not brought me to the Pioneer on a false scent, the squatter always ready with the landing-net. By the time I had exhausted the water from the boulder point of view, luncheon was ready upon the higher rocks over which the main channel of the river tumbled. Overhead a canopy of vines gave shade and shelter ; at our feet the water gambolled between and around the boulders ; at our side lay the rifles for the accommodation of a stray monster ; at our back a brook had created a gurgling channel of its own, as if preferring a peaceful and unostentatious outlet to the more imposing violence of the adjacent cataract. And near and far beyond the river-bed we were hemmed in by strange abundant foliage. In the middle distance of the main stream, across a line of rocks, and left high and dry upon the drift-wood brought down by the last flood, lay, white and perfect, the skeleton of an alligator that in life must have measured twelve feet. The bottles had been deliciously cooled in the river, and the feast was even luxuriously spread.

As the recently caught fish hung suspended from the branches of a tree they looked uncommonly like pike, and the resemblance had struck me when the first palmer came within scanning distance in the water. Even its manner of striking and fighting had reminded me of the pike, and the colour, as it flashed for a moment and disappeared in the final struggle, was exactly that of the familiar jack. There, however, the likeness ceased. Though there was a tendency to the bill-like head of the pike, I found that the palmer had no teeth, and that the bony rim of the mouth when stretched open was a pure oval. The dorsal fin was spiked like that of pike-perch. The eye in one light seemed red,

in another yellow, in another opal. It was a strong, game-some fish, and the eight-pounder gave me not a little trouble.

“Cast the bait close under the fall,” the obliging lender of the tackle had told me. Upon this hint I improved somewhat. The overhanging trees, the gap made by the sportsman just mentioned, and his long rod, enabled me to drop the phantom on the edge of the cascade, and over it came direct into the creamy bubble. It was taken in an instant, and the fish made a furious rush round the fountain hollowed out at the foot of the fall. He was well in hand, however, and acknowledged as much by darting through the shallow water, thirty yards without a pause, down-stream, artfully making for and gaining a reef of rocks, into which I feared he was hopelessly entangled. It took a good quarter of an hour to dislodge him by such gentle humouring as slackening the line and straining it from different positions suggested; and then came a smart tussle with the bended rod in open water.

The sport continued good intermittently during the afternoon, and I became reckless in the matter of wading. Cautioned twice by my friend when floundering waist-deep across the narrows, I forgot all warnings in the excitement of spinning, until by-and-by I received a caution of another kind. A deep pool seemed a probable place for a palmer, particularly the glide of a bye-wash on the further side. To send the bait to the desired spot could only be effected by wading in a distance of a couple of yards. Half a dozen casts producing no results, I backed out upon the rocks, and, simultaneously with my achieving foothold, a dark shadow in the water beneath turned and glided slowly, a tainter shadow every moment, into the deepest part of the pool. There crept over me, as I peered aghast into the water, a cold shiver that almost repeats itself as I recall the adventure. One of my friends—from whom I had wandered

unwittingly—was already shouting to me to keep away from the pool, and he had no reason to shout twice. It was a notorious alligator-haunt.

Some naturalists protest against the word “alligator,” averring that our Queensland hero is a crocodile. Whatever it may be, it is a dangerous customer to men and beasts. Horses and cattle going down to drink are often wounded. I know of two instances of men riding across a ford being mutilated in the leg, and of Polynesians and children being attacked while bathing, and dogs carried away. I saw the track of one of these creatures well defined from the water’s edge, about twenty yards into the scrub, where its soft, dingy white eggs had been laid.

[NOTE.—In this chapter I have sketched a thriving plantation precisely as I saw it during a period of general prosperity for the Queensland sugar industry. Since it was written, that industry has been threatened with destruction. The virtual abolition of coloured labour by the Queensland Government was one of the principal causes. Various pretences for this course have been put forward, but I believe that the real explanation will be found in the determination of the Australian working man to tolerate no cheap labour. Hence Chinamen and Kanakas must be kept out of the colonies. This view of coloured labour may be right or wrong. I offer no opinion, merely desiring to indicate one leading cause of the unfortunate decline of a once promising industry in Queensland.—W. S.]

## CHAPTER VII.

## THE SCHNAPPER PARTY.

THERE is a faint light in the east, though the Southern Cross and the less known, but certainly more beautiful, constellations of the austral heavens are still wondrously bright, when the throb of the engine vibrates through the little steamer, and we turn over under our blankets and uprouse. From the anchorage where we have been lying all night in the safe shelter of a bay we have an hour and a half of steaming to the fishing-ground. This is in the open Pacific, and if the wind were other than westerly we should not dare venture over the dangerous bar. But we have the blustering, skin-drying, plant-nipping, winter wind, which in Australia blows from the quarter of the setting sun, and our prospects are in all ways favourable. Last night the black fellow's whale-boat brought us a couple of bushel of sea-mullet and a big lump of dugong flesh, and the question of bait is thus set at rest. Last night we sang songs, and held mock trials, and recited, and made speeches, and roared with merriment under the awning on deck, and now, in the half-light of day-break, we turn out amongst the *débris* of the feast. But it is soon cleared away, and as soon as we can fairly see we busy ourselves in cutting up our baits, unwinding our lines and coiling them on deck, affixing hooks and sinkers, and obtaining from the mate canvas coverings for the foresingers to preserve them from the cutting of the line.

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The schnapper party is essentially a winter gathering, and as the distance involves two days' absence from home and duty, and the chartering of a steamer, and can only be had in anything like comfort during a wind which generally lasts but three days, it has to be indulged in sparingly. They are therefore the most enjoyable of excursions, even if, as sometimes happens, the sport is disappointing. As the steamer, on the fresh, bright young morning, speeds to the rocks around which the foam dashes, clouds of sea-fowl wheel and soar, and the schnapper congregate, we are eager for the fray, full of hope and glee, taking up our stations by the stanchions and along the rail from bow to stern, bait piled up in a heap of inch-and-a-half cubes in the scupper at our feet, and sackbag slung near to receive the fish. The line is of the thickness of a cedar pencil, and as the bottom will be from twenty to thirty fathoms deep, and there will probably be a strong drift, the sinkers should be at least three pounds' weight. Two large hooks will suffice, snooded on with three strands of twisted whipcord ; but these hooks should be of well-tempered stuff an eighth of an inch thick, and strongly barbed, and the lowest should be placed about a foot above the sinkers. Strange monsters may take your bait, and capture becomes a trial of physical force, in which the fish frequently gets the best of it, by straightening out or breaking the hook.

The ground reached, the thing to be aimed at is to bring the steamer as close to the rocks as is compatible with safety ; an operation that requires great care. The most comfortable kind of party should not consist of more than sufficient persons to occupy one side of the boat. All the fishing men can then accommodate themselves to the current, and fish with their lines well away in front of them. Those who have to operate from the other side are kept in perpetual irritation by their gear getting under the bottom of

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the steamer, and under such circumstances fishing is an impossibility, and the attempt a nuisance to the men whose lines will be everlastingly fouled. It is always amusing to scan the countenances of the sportsmen when the steamer stops. They are leaning against the rail, line in hand, and sinkers suspended over the side, listening for the signal from the captain. Until the word "down" is shouted the lines should not be released, lest, carried astern by the "way" of the ship, they should become entangled.

At the word, however, there are twenty splashes, and simultaneously the heavy sinkers are racing down into the clear blue water, leaving a quivering streak of sparkling silver to mark their downward course. Then the score of expectant fishermen assume striking attitudes. The lines rest on the rail (to which the angler stands close), and slant away perhaps ten yards before they pierce the surface of the water, and should the current be strong, the weights must be increased as required, since it is essential that the sinkers should touch the rocky bottom. The fisherman now stands like a sailor grasping a rope that is to be hauled up hand over hand, with the rail as a purchase, and haul he must right manfully when he has struck the biting fish. There is no time to be lost. In a quarter of an hour at the farthest, the steamboat will have drifted off the ground, and the bites that at first were fast and furious, will cease. "Up lines" is then the order passed along, and these being coiled neatly on the deck, the boat is steamed up once more to her work. A good deal of time is lost in this way, and yet another incentive to rapidity in manipulating the lines is the necessity of studying the tide for returning over the bar.

Should the excursion be a very fortunate one, many seconds will not elapse after the boat has stopped, before the first fish is taken. There is a bet upon this event, and great fun is often occasioned by the rival claims of three or

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four schnappers coming aboard at the same moment. Schnapper-fishing, as the reader may suppose, is downright hard work. None but stout arms and sturdy shoulders can stand the constant hauling up of, say, fifteen pounds' weight, resisting and fighting every inch of the voyage from a depth of never less than 120 feet. The shoulders ache ; the fingers, through which the wet line passes, become sore ; the boat rolls, perhaps heavily ; the decks, by constant dripping from the tackle, and slime from the fish, get slippery ; but the enthusiast hauls away as if for dear life, and regards with impatience the "waits" between the drifts, which others welcome as merciful breathing-time. The fish are lifted bodily over the rail, and plumped with a thud upon the deck, upon which they dance, creating at the liveliest episodes an inspiriting drumming fore and aft. The hook is not easily wrenched out of its hard hold, and the teeth, and spikes that seem to be concealed in every part of the gill-covers, increase the difficulty by lacerating the fingers.

On a good biting-day schnapper-fishing is not so much sport as slaughter. The strongest man is then the best angler. Directly the bait touches the bottom, and sometimes before, there is a rousing bite, similar in character to that of a perch. The strike must be a sharp one, and hand over hand the hauling up must begin at once, nor cease until the fish is aboard. The schnapper, on an ordinary day, averages about five pounds, but occasionally the drift brings you to a ground where they all seem to run seven, eight, and even ten pounds. Two powerful and resolute schnappers of eight pounds each, with three or four pounds of lead beneath, will bring the blood into your face before you can lift them bodily over the bulwarks. Far down in the clear ocean depth you behold the ascending fish, glancing right and left like silver shields of increasing size, and at times pursued by the predatory compatriots that instinc-

tively rush at a fellow-creature in distress. It will take two men to stagger ashore with your bag of fish at the close of such a day as this. A schnapper angler, nevertheless, setting good days against bad, will be satisfied with eighteen or twenty fish, but the party often returns with a total of 600, the smallest of which will be three pounds, and the largest (not often seen, however) fourteen pounds. Rarely indeed does it happen, if the sea is moderately calm, that the excursion is a blank to any member of the party.

The schnapper is not of comely shape, but its colouring is exquisite. The general tone is rose-pink, but the fins and head are tinted with lovely shades of pearl and violet, and the sides are speckled with spots of pure turquoise blue. Very quickly, however, the loveliness fades, and the delicate hues subside into a dull red complexion. Schnappers are classified by Dr. Günther as the percoid carnivorous group of the sparidæ family, and they are, in their season, the most plentiful of the edible fish of Australia.

The habitat being deep water around rocks and reefs, the fish is seldom taken by nets, but it is a voracious feeder, and easily caught with hook and line. Schnapper is good eating, boiled for preference, and served with egg sauce, and it is largely kippered and dried. Many kinds of fish are met with on the schnapper ground. The most frequent intruder is the kingfish, a handsomely-shaped fellow, with smooth mackerel-like skin, that follows the bait to the surface, and dashes at anything that moves in the water. This fish swims in shoals, and will take a spinning bait with wolfish eagerness. One or two ponderous groper, or rock cod, usually add to the spoils of a schnapper party, and as they often attain a weight of 60 lbs. odd, the captor has to call upon the friendly aid of his next neighbour. The groper comes up like a log. Having struck it, the striker fancies he is foul of a rock, but the sluggish strain upon the line is

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followed by a heavy shake or two, and by-and-by up comes the dull burden. Even when brought to the surface the fish does not accelerate its motion, but opens its portmanteau-like mouth, and wags its black ugly tail, till the boat-hook inserted in the gills effectually settles its hash. That same boat-hook, before the morning is over, will probably be required for a shark. The other lines will be hastily hauled up when the hooking of this prowler is announced, for the brute rushes hither and thither, tying up the tackle of a dozen men into hopeless knots, if summary proceedings be not speedily instituted. A seven-feet shark on a schnapper-hook undoubtedly affords considerable sport before a couple of boat-hooks and a running noose can be brought to bear upon it.

On a schnapper excursion there are some gentlemen who do not themselves fish, but who recline lazily on the skylights, pipe in mouth, and not far from the improvised table upon which a mighty round of beef, stacks of bottled beer and stout, bread and cheese, aerated waters, and tea and coffee, are kept for the hurried attacks of the fishing men between the drifts. When the fun is over, the gentlemen who looked so dapper at dawn, with their sheath-knives and belts, are now covered with scales and blood, and saturated with wet; and happy mortals they are, notwithstanding, as they survey their heavy bags.

On the return trip, there is a general washing, changing of clothes and scrubbing of decks; and a grand fish-breakfast, to which by the laws of the sport, each man contributes a fish, is soon laid out in the saloon. As a matter of fact, we have all broken our fast several times in a desultory manner during the excitement of the fishing-ground, but this is the first regular meal of the day, and as we are then in smooth water, it may be done justice to by the most qualmish. On land that night there is a wholesale distribution of braces of

schnapper amongst our friends ; and a present of the groper, kingfish, and a hundredweight of schnapper goes to the hospital. The return of the party is something of an event, since the fishing-ground is some sixty miles from Brisbane, and there are only four months in the year—May, June, July, and August—when the schnapper can be kept sweet for next day's consumption.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## THE SHEEP-STATION.

A CORDIAL invitation to visit one of the finest sheep-stations in Queensland was too great a temptation to be resisted. Yet, a more unfavourable season for a journey of nearly 400 miles into the interior could not be imagined. The colony was suffering from a drought, the like of which none but old colonists, and not many of them, could remember.

For a year and more, rain had not fallen. Watercourses never before known to be without water were baked hard. For leagues upon leagues, not a green spot would relieve the melancholy brown of the grazing-lands. The papers day by day, and week by week, published stories of perished stock and impoverished settlers. The talk everywhere was of impending ruin. The appearance of ever so small a cloud in the glaring sky was a sensation; men in the country suspended all toil to watch it and hope against hope, while in the little townships it was criticized and chronicled, and for the moment was the cause of more excitement than the war news from Eastern Europe, at that time reaching the critical point. It seemed to be a literal fulfilment of the terrible threat, "I will make your heaven as iron, and your earth as brass. And your strength shall be spent in vain: for your land shall not yield her increase, neither shall the trees of the land yield their fruits."

The native Queenslander, who, very properly, does not care to hear his country cried down, was forced to some sort of confession, and the visitor, or passing stranger, who ventured to suggest that the climate was severe, was anxiously informed that the season was exceptionally hot; as it certainly was. During an ordinary summer in Queensland, the lightest possible clothing will be necessary for at least seven months in the year. The atmosphere is nevertheless dry, and though a high, it is not necessarily a punishing thermometer even in high summer, December, January, and February. But the heat of this particular summer was, as a fact, phenomenally intense.

The railway from Brisbane, the metropolis of the colony, runs, roughly speaking, westward, and is destined to push as far in that direction as the humour of future Parliaments permits. It climbs the main mountain-range which runs parallel with the Queensland coast, and traverses the rich table-land which the early explorers looked upon, and rightly too, as comparable to the Land of Promise which the ancient pioneer, Moses, was allowed to scan, but not to enter. The scenery commanded by travelling up the skilfully-built railway is famous for its beauty. At this drought-time there was no relief, no beauty. The hot winds which are the bane of the other colonies rarely visit Queensland, but on the day of my start the novelty was experienced.

From the shoulders of some of the spurs you look upon magnificent expanses of thirty and forty miles of primeval forest; but with a heat haze quivering over the earth, and the smoke of a hundred forest fires lying low upon the seared tree-tops, what under more favourable circumstances is rare beauty, gladdening the eye, was now the monotony of desolation, oppressing the heart. Up the mountain gorges came, in lieu of cool breezes, hot blasts that made you draw quickly back as from a furnace-mouth. At Too-

woomba, the capital of the Darling Downs, the glass in the station verandah showed 109°.

At the end of the railway-line, or rather at the spot where for the present the rails ceased, within a few days a small township had sprung up—a township of galvanized iron, canvas, and weatherboards—a true colonial township, with rough and ready accommodation for man and beast, as became a place where the people felt themselves to be strangers and pilgrims. In the bush outside a caravan of laden drays had been long encamped, not caring to venture afield until pasture and water for their teams were vouchsafed ; and for the next two days, coaching still farther west, I heard from many a mouth execrations heaped with colonial fervour upon the laggard carriers. A charge of three shillings and sixpence for a pint bottle of English ale, an empty cupboard, an adulterated spirit-bottle, and such trifles as ill-furnished bed or board were, one and all, explained by the non-arrival of the drays since Christmas time.

At four in the morning we were roused from our out-spread blankets on the tavern floor by the coachman, and, ill-refreshed and half-awake, hurried out to resume our travels by the coach, whose Brobdingnagian lamp over the centre of the roof shed its powerful rays upon a dozen persons clamorously anxious to represent the regulation number of six. A very pretty picture they made in their varied gestures of appeal, threat, cajolery, and indignation, with the yellow light mottling them indifferently. To me, the fortunate possessor of a box-seat, the scene had its amusing side, for the coachman, who was “a character,” stolidly surveyed the expectant group, never moving a muscle. Eventually the groom released the heads of the leaders, leaving four unfortunates behind indulging in strong language ill-becoming the poetical associations of dawn, and destined to make the most of their opportunities in the infant

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township until the departure of the next coach two days later.

Into the gloomy bush the horses plunged. The first stage of ten miles was partly accomplished in the dark. The track wound through the forest. The lamp-lights streamed weirdly upon the gum-trees, and doubtless to the unaccustomed eye exaggerated the difficulties of the road. The "effects," at any rate, were marvellously effective, and at once recalled the well-known masterpieces of certain old-school artists. We were in truth speeding through a wild world of dark shadows, and at every turn in the track new dangers seemed to loom direct in the path. The coach rattled in and out, with few inches to spare, between the huge tree-trunks, and crashed through unconsidered under-growth. The trees close at hand assumed flitting, fantastic, spectral shapes, and the abysses beyond were fathomless.

All imperceptibly the dawn came. Night appeared to relent of its blackness before it betook itself away ; its visage gently relaxed, and day crept on so softly that no man could say when the one was here and the other there. The grotesque forms of tree and bush faded out too ; the familiar monotony of Australian forest quickly asserted itself, and almost before we were ready to comprehend his advent the sun was bounding up with a rosy flush to mark our course for another day.

The best coach-drivers in the world are probably Cobb and Co.'s men in Australia. The four-in-hands in Hyde Park used to claim one's admiration as a spectacle, but they would be mere toys on an Australian journey : spanking bays with black points, noble coachmen, and pert grooms, would be totally unequal to the test of practical work on the unmade track called, in the bush, a road. The coach upon which I suffered the first day's journey of ninety miles was a compact, heavily-built structure, upon leather compound

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springs of enormous strength ; the axles, double break, and harness seemed to the uninitiated to be of unnecessary power. A gallop or two into and out of a gully, a descent or two into a river-bed, a few miles of rocky mountainous country, however, showed that the equipments could not be too strong or too carefully looked after, and that the drivers should be, as they are, second to none.

Despite the never-failing good-humour of a genial squatter at my side, who sang like a nightingale, and prevented me from sleeping by vivid accounts of men who, to his knowledge, had been killed or maimed by dozing on the box-seat, that day was to me one of acute misery. I have heard it insinuated that an eel in time not only gets used to the process of skinning, but learns to like it ; and it may be that the drivers on this route get used to that fearful ninety-mile stage, and even prize it as a luxury. To me fifteen hours on the confined box-seat, travelling over rough country robbed of every vestige of life, with a hard upright wooden wall to pound the shoulders into jelly, and reaches of track upon which the coach faithfully imitated the pitching and rolling of a ship, could only be satisfactory as extreme penance.

Had there been something green to look at, something picturesque to admire, an occasional cloud obscuring the fierce sun, a bird or beast to disturb the solitude, it might have been tolerable. Yet the poor "insides" were worse placed. On the box we were at least elevated above the worst of the dust. At the end of the first stage the people within were thickly coated with sand, and venerable with soil powder. They were packed in like sardines, and, when the jolting was extra severe, we, from our outer perch, could hear such groans of abject despair that, in our vile selfishness, we would laugh until tears guttered channels down our grimy cheeks. Much of the country was sandy

waste, upon which probably nothing of service grows at any time, but no difference could be distinguished between this and grazing-runs, where, within two months of the termination of the drought, the stock would be seen revelling in deep green pasture.

On the afternoon of the third day, sore, travel-stained, but not wholly demolished, I made my last descent from the box-seat in the bright little town of Roma. Our four-horse team had been changed fifteen times, and the second day's stage of five-and-forty miles had been accomplished with a fresh coachman and another coach. In after days I heard the readings of the thermometer, during the three days over which the journey extended, giving at anything from  $132^{\circ}$  to  $100^{\circ}$ , and should not have been surprised had the record been of thousands instead of hundreds. Evermore those figures of speech representing the hart panting for the water-brooks, wells of water in thirsty lands, green pastures and still waters, will have new beauty and force to me.

It was curious to find that, as one might say, by a miracle, isolated strips and belts of country had, during this tremendous drought, been visited by fitful showers. Thus, the station to which I had journeyed had almost to the last remained an oasis in the desert. Fellow-travellers, learning my destination, had promised me this, and the thought was cheering. It made the sand in my teeth less gritty, and the hardships of the road more bearable. The station buggy was at the coach-office at the end of the journey, to whisk me, without loss of time, to Mount Abundance.

When you do meet with hospitality in the colonies, it is of the true description. Big bearded men, who enjoy very little of the society of womankind from year to year, and who could not, therefore, be expected to spoil you with pampering, take charge of you with a thoughtfulness com-

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patible only with the purest sincerity. You do not, it is true, always meet with such hospitality in the colonies—perhaps not so frequently as in the earlier days of settlement, Nor have you a right to expect it. Colonists have to win success by the closest hand-to-hand struggle, and have often enough to do to look to themselves. But it was my good fortune to experience it in its most delightful aspect for the first time at Mount Abundance, and though the experience was afterwards repeated in other parts of the colonies, the memory of my sojourn there remains, like its grassy plains, fresh and sweet.

In one sense I was disappointed with Mount Abundance. You have cause to be disappointed if, after by hearsay and written description you have formed a definite notion of a thing, you find your notion absurdly astray. In my mind I had, by various reading of books in the old country, acquired a definite comprehension of an Australian sheep-station. The bushmen's huts were to be in their proper place, very tumbledown, and open to the weather. The black pot of tea must stand upon the slab that served as a table ; the damper should be smothered in wood-ashes, cooked on the earthen floor. The shepherds, armed to the teeth, of course lived the lives of hermits, waging constant warfare with the blacks. The squatter's home might be better than a shanty of slabs with a roof of bark, but not much. It was, to be brief, somewhat of a barbaric sketch which I had made for myself, telling that it represented a condition of affairs outside the pale of civilization.

The original stereotyped descriptions of life in the Australian bush may still stand good for some runs in remote districts ; but every year brings manifold improvements. As the country becomes populated, as scientific appliances increase, and means of transit multiply, masters and men put off the half-savage habits with which they

were, ten and twenty years ago, content, and if any are retained they are concealed with shamefacedness, and not made a subject of boast and pride. It is found as easy to be civilized as semi-barbarous.

Apart from its natural advantages, Mount Abundance Station had had the benefit of being owned by an enterprising and wealthy company, and of being managed by a gentleman whose advice the company was wise enough to follow. The Australian owner or manager of a station, in his position and pursuits, reminds you very much of those old-world squatters, the patriarchs. The manager in question had rule over something like 8000 square miles of country, and must ride twenty miles straight ahead, in different directions, if he would visit his immediate out-stations. Such a man is king, and well is it when, as in this instance, he reigns in the esteem and affection of his people.

My suspicions as to the inaccuracy of my cherished idea of a sheep-station were aroused when we turned off the high-road, and a respectable-looking woman came out of a neat cottage lodge and opened, not the two or three slip rails which one generally sees, but a pair of orthodox lodge gates. It was altogether too English: so was the park-like paddock in which sleek horses grazed. Across a creek I caught sight of a cluster of white houses through the trees, and one large building upon an eminence, like a substantial, unpretending country house. Here was a neat, wholesome little town, and not a sheep-station. Indeed I have seen townships in Australia to which this would be a beautiful city. When I knew more about it, and understood the matter, it was evident that the truest economy had been exercised in making the place what it was. The manager being absent, I could gather from the people with whom I came in contact that he was a man who had looked ahead,

and farther than the almighty dollar. It was clear that he believed human beings should live in human habitations and have, whenever possible, human surroundings. Down, therefore, came the slab shanties with their bark roofs, and up went decent cottages, to stand witness to the advantages of sanitary science. In a word, at a glance (verified by closer acquaintance) Mount Abundance stood revealed, a model station by comparison with many others, and in the same degree of difference as exists between the model farms of England and the wretched homesteads that once so much disgraced the rural districts.

To know that the fine property around was the result of British capital upon Australian soil was not calculated to diminish one's interest in it. Colonial experience is too often of either extreme prosperity or extreme adversity, and here was an exemplification of the former. The Scottish Australian Investment Company was formed at Aberdeen in 1840, as a financial concern, to lend money on pastoral security; and though it started in bad times, it was always successful. What is now settled country was then almost unknown land, and soon after Queensland was proclaimed a separate colony the Scotch pioneers shrewdly pushed beyond the eastern seaboard to the western outside districts.

During the intervening years the company acquired, beside Mount Abundance, other stations, such as Mount Cornish, carrying 50,000 head of cattle, and Bowen Downs, carrying 130,000 sheep. Let the English tenant farmer, or the biggest of graziers, realize the figures which are here given as an example of the vastness of pastoral pursuits in this young colony. The stations above mentioned occupied 5000 square miles of superb country, part leased from the Crown, part, and the best part, purchased as inalienable freehold; and the company owned some 400,000 sheep and 60,000 cattle.

After a bath, I am bound to confess that my first attention was paid neither to sheep nor horses, but to a vineyard. Of course, not one station in five hundred can boast such a luxury. The Roma district, however, is famous for its grapes. I was shown a bunch of black grapes weighing seven pounds, and the fruit all large and of faultless flavour. Under the shady leaves of the low vines, on the hottest day, the bunches of grapes are always cool, and what better for the thirsty traveller than these? Nothing, unless it might be the delicious bronzed figs hanging ripe and ready near the gates, defying you to pass them by without a trial. Every morning I paid a visit to the favourite vines, and upon every breakfast-table stood a dish of fruit, white and black, with bloom beautiful enough to awaken the envy of any artist.

But, after all, the vineyard must be regarded as an "extra." Under no circumstances can it be made a legitimate part of a sheep-run; not, at any rate, in the same sense as the saw-mill, the wheelwright's shop, the store, the counting-house, the saddler's shed; and still more not in the same sense as the great wool-shed, the washing-places, the big dam, the paddock, the stockyard, and the slaughter-yard. These were all included in the organization of the place, and the work was carried on as regularly as in a town house of business. With a thousand horses on the station, in one place and another, the saddler and wheelwright would find ample employment; with the head-station alone comprising 900 square miles, the ration-carriers, boundary-riders, and fencers would necessarily be constantly coming in and going out, delivering their reports and receiving stores, and keeping the office-clerk and storekeeper in constant employment.

And how proud the worthy sheep-superintendent was of his merinos! Fortunately for me, it was one of the occa-

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sional intervals between the periodical occupations essential to sheep-breeding, and during my visit the sheep were being neither shorn, nor branded, nor ear-cut, nor subjected to any of the necessary and sometimes unpleasant processes demanded by the mutual welfare of themselves and their owners. Day by day, therefore, the sheep-superintendent gave me the benefit of his wise guidance and pleasant companionship, and ever indeed shall I be grateful to him for his patience with one whom he had every right to regard as a wretched Cockney who, according to colonial estimation, insulted a saddle by getting into it, and was ignorant of the difference between a hog and a hogget. For a man who had been concerned with sheep, popularly supposed to be the most trying to human forbearance of the animal creation, and which are credited with souring the best of tempers, my friend was a marvel of amiability.

The best of men, nevertheless, have their weaknesses, and his took the form of riding at a steady jog-trot pace. A man who spends all his days, weeks, months, and years in the saddle will suit any pace, and any pace will suit him. It is different when you come fresh to the work, and then, although your judgment may respond to the theory that jogging at five miles an hour is the fairest way of getting a good day's travel out of your horse, your inclinations will suggest either an absolute walk or the usual colonial canter. But my friend was a man who believed in taking care of his cattle, and I gave him my sympathy to the extent of stiff joints and an aching back. He informed me, amongst other things, that if I saw a horse with a sore back I might be certain it had been ridden by a parson or a lady ; at any rate, that this was bushman's creed.

The first day he let me off leniently ; just an eighteen-mile ride over the plains, and along the end of a paddock the fence of which was six-and-thirty miles long—quite a nice

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little field of 18,000 acres, enclosed with sound wire fence. Then, as a reward for good behaviour, in the evening he ordered out the buggy and planned a shooting expedition. Cartridges were filled with large shot, and the breechloader was put together. The shooting had to be done from the buggy, and the game was none of your small parrot fry, but one of the large feathered game of the Colony, the wild turkey or bustard. It was remarkably comfortable amusement, the very pastime for a lazy man and a sportsman who is good at objects not bigger than a haystack.

The country hereabouts consists of immense plains covered with rich tussock-grass, and the game has to be approached warily. The wild turkey is not hasty in its movements, but it is artful. You must apply a circular treatment. Afar, you espy a small something moving above the tops of the tussocks. It is a turkey's head. The experienced whip at once alters his route, pulls his horses into a walk, and drives spirally round the bird, which, half curious and half self-confident, watches the distant object, and stalks slowly off. The circle described by the buggy is meanwhile becoming smaller. Its slow pace, and the absence of excitement in horses and men, deceive the turkey until too late. The bird begins to comprehend what it all means when you are within thirty or forty yards, spreads its broad wings, and rises somewhat leisurely, to drop, if the sportsman in the buggy is equal to the occasion, a mass of fluttering feathers into the grass.

Six times in the course of an hour and a half I had the pleasure of going through this programme, carrying it out to the letter. A hen turkey tried hard to escape by strategy. I had marked her down a quarter of a mile off, and never lost sight of the spot. Still, on nearing the tussock by which we had steered, there was no sign of a bird. It was then suggested that I should alight, and I did so. Suddenly,

and with a disturbance that startled me not a little, the turkey got up within five yards of my feet. She had been artfully compressing herself into a small space between the tussocks, and with a success that ought to have secured her a more generous treatment than she shortly received. But the end justified the means. She weighed seventeen pounds, and if as a roast she was a trifle tasteless and tough, as a curry on the following morning she deserved all praise.

On a subsequent wild-turkey expedition I shot off a horse's back, or, to be very accurate, between his ears. This seemed to be the animal's real vocation in life, and the old fellow, after serving the station for many years, was chiefly kept for the express purpose. He always had his eye on the game, and would not move a muscle while you fired, until about the twelfth shot, when, probably annoyed by the prolonged smell of the powder, he would shake his head in evident disapproval. A very stupid miss on my part was marked by him—or I fancied so—in a decided manner; he looked round gravely, it seemed reproachfully, and having caught my eye, walked on without waiting, as was his general custom, for the signal to move on.

There was, I may mention while the subject of sport is before us, other game than wild turkeys on the station. The book-keeper had potted an interesting specimen the day before my arrival, and I saw its framework on the sandy path leading to bachelors' quarters, stripped in a few hours of every vestige of flesh by the ants. Indeed, the object looked as if it had been bleaching in the sun for ages. For picking the bones of such small deer as a snake, nothing better could be desired than an ant-heap. The skeleton in question was all that remained of a diamond snake which Mr. R., sitting in a summer-house, reading a paper, saw peering at him from a rafter; nay, not only peering, but

thrusting down its head and part of its body, and protruding its tongue in an exciting manner. Rarer than other varieties, and also dangerous, is the diamond snake ; and Mr. R. was not anxious to offer his enemy improper provocation. But it was nearing the time when he should ring the men back from breakfast, and the snake showed no signs of retreating. He therefore blew a whistle, and the housekeeper answered it. He sent her for a gun, and this being stealthily handed to him from the rear, the snake was shot. The snakes, however, on these open plains are not so numerous as in scrub, bush, and rock country.

Emus were plentiful, but somehow one does not care to shoot them for mere sport. Bushmen, when rations run short, are only too glad to get the chance of bringing one down, or discovering its eggs, and they afterward tell you with watering mouths how dainty a dish both flesh and egg make. It is, however, no easy matter to get within shot of an emu. You may stalk to rifle distance, but must be wary to do so much. You may ride the bird down, moreover, if you are mounted on a fleet horse that can make the running during the first burst. The emu goes off at a tremendous pace, and then pauses a moment to get second wind. Then is your time or never, for when the bird settles down to second flight it outstrips its pursuer in nine cases out of ten.

After watching an emu with six little ones trotting after her, trusting with the sublime confidence in her power to scent danger and to shield them from it, I could not have drawn trigger upon one of the family without full justification ; indeed, as they are not numerous enough to do much damage, and are a pretty sight on the plains, they are, I found, seldom molested. On the contrary, you often find them tamed at the head-stations, where their singular tastes and comical habits afford much amusement. I

once saw one that was credited with swallowing a hobble chain, and looting a keg of nails to the extent of a quart of two-inch wire spikes. After a meal of iron it invariably strutted out into the paddock and ate a quantity of grass, by the assistance of which it ultimately got rid of the indigestible materials without harm.

In the tussock-grass there were plenty of small quail and kangaroo rats. I couple them because they resembled each other in lying still till you were close upon them, and in escaping as swift as an arrow. The rat scampers off with quick bound, showing his tail as does a rabbit, and the quail is up and off like a flash. In the creek there were a few teal and wood-duck, and on the washing dam there were a variety of wild-fowl, which the manager would never allow to be disturbed. Parrots abounded in the timbered patches, and now and then you might find a flock of stone-plover. But as a rule you might ride for a day without meeting any game but rat, quail, or turkey.

It will be of course impossible to narrate the history of each day spent by me on this model sheep-station. They were days sometimes of hard work, but they were very happy ones, and all too few. Each morning the horses stood saddled at the door before breakfast was done, and by that time the people on the station had often travelled twenty and thirty miles upon their various avocations. My friendly *cicerone*, the sheep-superintendent, as I have stated, let me off at first with an easy day's work, but on the succeeding morning we started upon what the colonial, who rides sometimes seventy and odd miles a day on the same horse—grass-fed, too—would think gentle exercise, but which the neophyte might well deem a fair journey. It was a distance of fifty miles over open country, with sun shining at 130 degrees. How welcome were those fifteen-minute halts to smoke a pipe on the margin of a water-hole,

and drink deep of its cool contents ! How carefully we filled the canvas water-bags slung at the saddle-bow ! How free one felt riding under the broad brim of a cabbage-tree hat, troubled with nothing more than shirt open at the throat, breeches fastened by a belt (to which was attached one pouch for watch, and another for tobacco and pipe), boots, and spurs. Distant mountains with dim outlines of purple bounded the horizon very far away, and over the rolling plains, green with verdure save where the black-soil roads were marked as fine thread, the heat haze simmered. Flies swarmed in myriads, rendering necessary a light net curtain depending from the hat rim, to protect the rider, and a fringe of tasselled leather from the forehead strap of the bridle to shield the horse's eyes.

From a swelling bosom of the plain, named by an admiring visitor Pisgah, a superb prospect was open to view—a picture of verdant prairie, diversified by clumps of scrub, rolling gently into a thousand variations of surface, and framed with mountain ranges, sometimes showing ridge, saddle, and scarp, in bold relief, sometimes melting into the dim region of shadow, until they were mingled with the fleecy clouds. But the dominating idea of the whole was immensity of space, and perfect freedom. It was a vast solitude, but not a desert. The landscape grew upon you, as you sat in the saddle, surveying it from every point of the compass, and it grew on until it became fixed in the memory as a dream of glorious pastoral plenty.

But there were the shearing-sheds, and the apparatus connected with shearing, to be inspected, if not from inclination, at least out of courtesy to the "boss," who was proud of them with the pride of an artist who knew their excellence. Upon a station like this, shearing is naturally not the rough-and-ready operation it used to be, and still is upon runs more remote from civilization. Whatever improvements

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have been introduced to produce superior wool, and lessen the cost of production, had been provided. Shearing is the harvest-time of the sheep-run. The fall of a penny per pound in the price of wool means the loss of a great fortune to large owners. It is, therefore, an anxious time, and an important process. A hundred extra hands had been employed at the last shearing ; 164,000 sheep were sheared in eight weeks ; and I could not withhold my exclamation of surprise and delight upon hearing that in one day, when everything worked with maximum smoothness, the shearers disposed, in a workmanlike manner, of 6000 sheep. The average sheep shorn in one day by a man is not often so high as this—perhaps not more than sixty or seventy, but the heroes in question were master-men, and made an effort on that particular day to outdo themselves.

Riding away from the great reservoir of water which feeds the sheds at wool harvesting, I heard much of the enemies against which the sheep have to be protected. One of them, the most dreaded, I saw slinking, like a cowardly thief as he is, into a belt of scrub. It was the dingo, part wolf, part fox, and part dog, for he has the ferocity of the wolf, the cunning and speed of the fox, and resembles the dog sufficiently to bear its name. It is not so much the mutton or lamb that he himself eats, as the wholesale mischief he does by chivying the whole flock and wounding as many as he can reach, that is deplored. By the watchers on a sheep-run this miscreant is detested, and they shoot it, poison it, trap it, and destroy it by every means in their power. A price is put upon the wild-dog's head.

The little kangaroo rat is, in its small way, an enemy also, through its love of wild yams, to indulge which it must perforce tear at the roots of the tussocks. Kangaroos and wallabies, if they are not kept out or kept down, will be enemies of the same degree. The Bathurst burr is an

enemy of another kind. Growing in its youthful innocence, this plant might be taken for an aristocratic thistle, but it destroys the grass, and its burrs cling to the wool and mat it into uselessness. It overruns the country like a plague; legislation has been called in to stamp it out; on this one station alone fifteen Kanakas were employed to wander about with hoes and root it up without mercy. A very vicious enemy is the bird called the eagle-hawk, but which is in reality a fine eagle, the wedge-tailed eagle of Australia. He is a noble-looking bird, and his fault is, that he does not hesitate before lamb because mint-sauce is lacking; at lambing time he is a scourge to the sheep-runs, and he is a doubly formidable enemy by virtue of his powerful pinions and proverbial eyesight. With these enemies, and more, to fight, there is always work to be done on a sheep-run; and the natural divisions of a sheep-farmer's season—lambing, weaning, tail and ear-cutting, branding, and drafting, culminating with the bustling activity of shearing—bring with each its own cares and labours.

At bachelor's quarters every night we had an hour's music before getting inside the mosquito curtains. The harmonium was opened, and across the creek, and far over the plain, floated the echoes of song, duet, and glee, and a young Scotch gentleman's performance of "The Banks of Allan-water" drew down upon him the task of repeating it nightly by special request. On Sunday afternoon, service was held in the verandah of "the House," a hard-working devoted clergyman riding out from Roma to conduct it, and a neighbouring schoolmaster officiating at the harmonium. In the manager's office there were Carlyle, Christopher North, Scott, Burns, Macaulay, and a host of other friends, such as a clannish North British reading man would possess, at my disposal.

The reader will therefore credit me when I confess that I

was sorry to see the last of life on this sheep-station ; but he would not credit me if I averred that I did not covet its rich pastures and multitudinous flocks. The time came, however, when the buggy was ordered out to take me back to the Roma coach-office. Outside the fence, as we crossed the home-paddock, the clouds of dust, caused by the unfortunate sheep which had been travelling by at the rate of fifty thousand a week in search of grass, rolled like smoke from a battle-field ; and the last I saw of Mount Abundance was—a couple of famished sheep that had been left to their fate, staggering in the sand across the road, and falling, a heap of miserable skin and bone, close to the fence, to die feasting their glazing eyes, may be, upon the happy pastures from which they were debarred.

## CHAPTER IX.

## A FAVOURITE FISHING-GROUND.

WE can swing in our hammocks and scan the Pacific Ocean, and in the lonely watches of the night, under the Southern Cross, its voice is heard. We see it gloomy and white in its wrath, or, which is fortunately more often, lighted up with a wide, innocent smile. We hear it to-day, soft as a lullaby, and, lullaby-like, partaking of that undertone of sadness which always characterizes the low music of the sea ; and we may hear it to-morrow hoarsely roaring in rage when its mighty rollers, checked in their career, curve and topple over upon the beach, dashing its lofty wall of emerald into sheets of hissing foam, which expend themselves in a broad stream, impotent to do more than varnish the hard sand. All the beautiful lines which poets have written about the "hollow-sounding and mysterious main" come back to memory, and, repeating them at wakeful midnight moments, or in the dreamy siesta of noonday, we are soothed into tranquil, indolent slumber. What matters? If the sea destroys, it soothes. The thing which creates terror also dispenses peaceful calm. Thus our cottage by the sea is a watch-tower from which to observe this many-mooded ocean ; and it is a citadel from which we issue forth to try conclusions, and lay it under tribute.

For this is our favourite fishing-ground. The rocks jutting out in spurs leave, between the two reefs, a sequestered

hollow under the low sandy cliff, which, by the assistance of an old mainsail, the ladies can use as a ready-made bathing-house. Between the fissures, mussels and whelks supply a plentiful store of bait, which Black Sam gathers, boils, opens, and cuts into small pieces, when required. Out upon the bar, sharks of fourteen feet, or thereabouts, show their brown backs to the sunshine ; but there is a second sandbank between it and the shore, and within this no shark of dangerous size will venture. From this barrier to the beach, along which the bleached trunks and grotesque limbs of many a gum-tree lie thick, there is a level reach of the hardest sand, and upon this you may wade for three hundred yards without getting breast-deep. This is our whiting-ground. Off the afore-mentioned rocks, fish of other kinds may be found, and beyond that second sandbank there is Shark Bay, in which exciting sport is to be had with the large sanguinary game from which it takes its name.

The prettiest angling in Queensland is with whiting, and our best ground is that fine beach in front of the cottage. Beyond the shark-haunted bar is the Pacific, without an impediment between it and America. To the left runs a broad channel, separating Stradbroke Island from the mainland ; from the right comes down the river Nerang. The place is, therefore, of the fish, fishy.

In the hammock I have pretended to read, but the eye has wandered first to the spit of land where half a hundred pelicans are stationed with never a movement amongst them ; then to the knoll covered with bracken, strong in the sandy soil ; then lazily over the blue water, upon the tumble of foam on the bar, and on the trackless, shining, placid ocean. At last, in drowsy wisdom, it tries to concentrate itself upon a soaring gull, and in the effort, the pipe drops out of the mouth, the book falls from the hand, the hammock swings no more, and a deep sleep supervenes. From this,

Black Sam, the fisherman, recalls me. The tide has turned, and the way to fish for whiting is to go out and meet the flood when it is an hour old, and retreat to land with it.

We always keep an old suit of clothes for this purpose; nothing can be done without wading, and in this climate there is no fear of catching cold. So, with a broad-brimmed cabbage-tree hat, a loose-throated shirt, duck trousers, a pair of blucher boots, a roomy creel strapped across the shoulders, a canvas bait-bag hung in front from the belt which is so much better than miserable braces, and a rod composed of a single black bamboo cut from the garden, and fitted with running tackle, standing rings, fine line, and a moderately strong gut footline and small hooks, we wade into the advancing tide until we are knee-deep. Sometimes a medium-sized float may be used, but there is no real necessity for such a luxury, and as often as not it is a hindrance instead of a help. The rod should be about as stiff as a Thames punt rod, and the best sport will be found in an adaptation of the legering system. A pellet cast from a small mould, of, say, half the weight of an ordinary bullet, will be amply sufficient in calm weather, but if the tide should happen to be turbulent, a larger weight may be necessary. Our equipment is now complete, if to the catalogue you finally add a sheathed knife attached to the right-hand side of the leathern belt.

What a mistake it is to suppose that, given a plentiful shoal in the sea, and a little-fished ground, sport may be reckoned upon as a certainty. There are times when the greediest fish swarm around the hooks as if only to make sport of the fisherman. Even in the coarsest forms of handline fishing it always pays to use the finest tackle consistent with probabilities. In our whiting fishing, it is true, many hooks and footlines are lost by unexpected marauders prowling by, but in the long run the most careful style pays

best. The whiting has a small mouth, to which a corresponding bait, only concealing the full-sized roach-hook, must be accommodated. The whiting ground is paved with ribbed sand, hard as a floor, and the slender forms of the sportive fish may be seen darting away in a cinnamon flash as you approach. Along the edge of the surf the water is always a little discoloured, and by casting the bait half a dozen yards beyond it will alight upon the smooth, clean bottom, and the tightened line, running freely through the pellet hole, will give you prompt notice of a bite. You get a sharp knock, and your strike must correspond. With as little play as may be, bring in your fish and lift him bodily up, as you stand with the waves dashing over your knees. Unhook him, and slip him through the hole in the creel, without loss of time, and then, by-and-by, when the tide has reached its full, you may stagger up the sandy drive to the cottage with a three-and-twenty pound basket crammed to the cover. The whiting in shape more resembles a grayling than any other fish I have seen, but the colouring above is a light brown, and the fins are tipped with yellow. A pound fish is a rarity ; it is a good average sample when the spoil ranges between half a pound and three-quarters. Sometimes all the fish run small, and sometimes they run scarce, too. At other seasons three of us may happen to come back with a total of twelve or fourteen dozen, all caught in a sportsmanlike manner with rod and line.

The intruders not desired, and perhaps dreaded, by the whiting fisher are many. First comes the stinging ray. On your trudge across the beach to the incoming sea, you may observe saucer-like hollows scooped out of the sand, not unfrequently a yard in diameter. When the water is up, these will be filled with stinging rays, locally termed stingamaree, snugly lying *perdu*, and should your naked foot plump down upon it, a lash of the tail, armed with a

poisonous spike, may lay you on your back with an inflamed leg, which you will have cause to remember. The stinging ray is shaped much like our own skate, and when the whiting are being merrily hooked two at a time, nothing so much tries the patience as to find yourself fast in such a broad, flapping brute. The shortest road out of the difficulty is to retire to land at once, dragging the ray slowly after you ; then run him up high and dry and settle his business with your sheath-knife. A twenty-pound ray fast upon the hook means a loss of fifteen or twenty minutes.

A sharkling is more easily disposed of, for his teeth will set him free, though the hook be attached to the stoutest gimp, and as he fights madly he is pretty certain in a few moments to have severed the gut. The ray and the shark are so much vermin. Not so the flathead, which, like the whiting, is excellent eating, and not to be lost if it can be helped.

The flathead lies upon the bottom and sucks the bait so gently that you are generally unaware of his attentions until an accidental withdrawal of the line meets with a solid resistance. The sharp teeth here are odds in favour of escape, but the chances are about equal, and a four or five pound flathead landed with fine tackle is, notwithstanding the inevitable loss of time, not regarded as a nuisance like the ray and shark. Upon the rounded back of this fish there are two or three dangerous spikes, and the same sort of weapon lurks about the gill covers. The flathead must, therefore, be approached with caution, and disabled at once. In miscellaneous fishing along the Australian coast, the shark, stinging ray, and flathead may always be expected to pay you a casual visit.

In front of the cottage lies a flat-bottomed dingy at anchor, and at high water we occasionally row down to the rocks for another kind of sport. The bottom outside is reefy, and even here there are difficulties to be encountered.

Large fish break away, and the hook gets entangled in the coral. The black bream is what I may call our stand-by, and there is no bolder biting or livelier fish. It runs to two and three pounds, but the fish caught are good if they average three-quarters of a pound. I always fish for them as if for perch, and a bit of mullet flesh is an excellent bait. There is a fish which seems to be a compromise between the schnapper and bream, called the squire, and this fellow haunts a particular reef of sunken rocks a quarter of a mile from shore. There are certain queer customers which we haul into the boat hereabouts, strange inhabitants of the ocean, many of which have nicknames derived from structural or other peculiarity; there are some which have an uncanny shape and expression, and these you probably will not care to handle. You may imagine sometimes that you are dragging up a piece of driftwood. But do not be rash. Draw up as gently as if it were a baby you feared to waken, and you may obtain a delicacy for breakfast in the shape of a crab. Some of the Australian shell-fish are brilliantly tinted, but they are not for table purposes to be compared to those of English waters. Still, even such a lanky crustacean has some sweet pickings in the larger claws.

A friend of mine, who had also set up his cottage by the sea, when the close of the session relieved him from his legislatorial duties, came down to spend his recess on this Pacific beach, and he was kind enough to give me a record of his fishing from surf and dingy during one season.

He rather laid himself out for big game in Shark's Bay, using heavy tackle, and baiting with small fish. His season lasted between October and April, and there were two months of bad weather. The total of fish caught was 3060, and of these at least four-fifths were whiting. Forty-six monster stinging rays were caught, the largest weighing 140 lbs. Of sharks, he caught thirty with hook and line, the largest, measuring

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10 ft. 2 in. long, towing him about the bay for the space of half an hour, before he could get him in command. His largest whiting was 1 lb. 5 ozs., flathead  $4\frac{1}{4}$  lbs. A worthy boat-builder, however, caught a flathead of 10 lbs. My friend's stingamarees were generally harpooned, but the big one was taken with a shark hook, and gave an enormous amount of trouble. The brute was 5 ft. 5 in. across, was more than a foot thick, and its tail was 6 ft. long, not reckoning the fag end, which had been lost probably in warfare. I have seen rays as large as this spring a yard out of water, apparently in mere sport.

## CHAPTER X.

## CAMPING OUT.

WE were, originally, a party of six who courageously determined to leave the haunts of civilized men, and try our hands at the ancient custom of dwelling in tents. The expedition was planned after prolonged consultation, during which the most entrancing visions were indulged in of nomad life; days and hours tipped with joy and illumined with peace; and sport that was to be simply monotonous in the immensity of its success. Each member of the consulting party was enthusiastic. Nor wind nor weather should turn him from his purpose. Firm as adamant, we shook hands on the business, pledged to rally round each other to the end. It was almost a matter of course that, as the day of departure drew nigh, a goodly percentage backed out of the undertaking, leaving us, nevertheless, the benefit of their opinions as expressed on the night of consultation, and their contributions to that which often proves the most unalloyed pleasure of an expedition, namely, the anticipation and scheming of it. Finally, the half-dozen were reduced to three: and, as matters turned out, a party of six, however good and true the men might have been, would have proved a Mutual Nuisance Association, unlimited.

Under canvas I had been before, in the old country, at Shoeburyness and at Autumn Manœuvres, and once I had

spent two nights of torment and strife with mosquitoes in the mountains, near Brisbane. But we were now bound to distant parts where no news from the outer world would be likely to disturb us, and where, if we so willed, we might wander in as primitive garb as the clothes-hating black fellow. Reversing the orthodox process, we settled last upon the particular hare to be caught ; in other words, having decided to camp out and how to do it, we settled where to go.

There was an endless choice before us ; but certain lakes were mentioned in a casual manner, and for a time rejected. A member of the party, who shall henceforth be known as Number One, however, plumped down the balance in favour of the Noosa Lakes by the astonishing statement that one of those prosaic Scotchmen who make the best of Colonists had, in describing them, been betrayed into fervidly quoting a couple of lines from Wordsworth.

The committees of ways and means upon the question of supplies would have afforded intense amusement to an on-looker. Our original list of provisions and implements, necessities and luxuries, would have been not unreasonable for a journey to the Afghan frontier, but was ridiculous for a fortnight's outing, including a sea-voyage in a steamer of limited tonnage. Those of us who had wives called them into council, and were consequently overwhelmed with speedy shamefacedness, and brought to feel that the man who has not learned that woman is, in these affairs, a born manager has stopped short at an important stage of his education. Eventually, the supplies were arranged for, purchased or borrowed, and packed ; and we set forth with a vague feeling that our equipments after all were at best but an unsatisfactory description of compromise, save in the item of ammunition, of which we took a formidable store, out of all proportion to what we by-and-by required.

Out of Moreton Bay the *Bulgoa* heads north, and

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hugs the land throughout the night. The steamer has been built primarily for the conveyance of timber from the richly wooded scrub country whither we are bound, and has a lighter draught, and flatter bottom, perhaps, than befits an orthodox passenger-boat. So, the tides and currents running very strong and contrary along this portion of the coast, there is somewhat of a cross sea, and the *Bulgoa* soon becomes restive, while her feebler passengers are, in the too familiar manner, making signals of distress. The voyage terminates at Tewantin, an infant port of rising importance.

Here, the passengers for the great Gympie gold-field disembark to complete their travels along a new route now coming into fashion. Here is the dépôt of a timber-producing firm, who may be said to be monarchs of the country-side for miles, and without whose good graces we had better leave our baggage on board and return per next voyage to our respective homes. But happily we obtain those good graces, and our way is henceforth smooth.

The firm, through its local representative, offers tempting hospitality, which we stoically decline, explaining that we have come out to rough it and put aside the pamperings of home life. We are impatient to enter upon the next stage of our journey, for, if possible, we have resolved to sleep under canvas to-night. So we sit upon our baggage on the wharf waiting for the departure of a tiny steamer named the *Alabama*, a home-made affair admirably adapted for river work, for which she was built, and in which we are to steam to the Cootharaba Mills, eighteen miles up the river, and the centre of the firm's operations. "The firm" is the correct expression, as I find in conversation with the people about the landing-place. Dynasties and governments pass muster in other parts of the world ; here, everything revolves around "the firm."

Meanwhile, I unstrap my gun-case on the wharf, and put

a double A cartridge into the barrels. Between the Heads and Tewantin we steam past sandy spits that are covered with flocks of pelicans, curlews, and other water-fowl; and pelicans, we are assured, will be found in every reach of the upper part of the river. The captain of the *Alabama* has been requested to "stop her" whenever an opportunity offers for a bit of sport, and I hasten here and now to state that, though he is doubtless eager to reach his home and family in time to spend a long Saturday evening in their midst, he observes his instructions not more in the letter than in the spirit. Even now, before we start, he shows an anxiety to further our wishes. He looks inquiringly at me as I put the breach-loader together, and being informed by a jerk of the head that I have designs upon a couple of pelicans swimming slowly down the stream, about 200 yards above, orders his boy to take me in the *Alabama*'s dingy. The youngster is only too pleased to assist in the sport, and stealthily paddles towards the birds.

We thus lessen the distance by a hundred yards, and the pelicans, though they evidently are aware of our approach, betray no alarm. They only change their course a point or two, perch their heads on one side, and swim a trifle faster. In this way we get to within sixty yards. Then, the gleam of the uplifted barrel, or some other movement, frightens them, and they heavily flap their wings for flight. One escapes; the other receives the charge, drops dead, and is duly seized by the neck and hauled into the dingy by the delighted youngster. We intend to shoot pelicans for the sake of their skins, and here is the first contribution, neatly delivered, without a single shot-hole in the broad, white, full-plumaged breast. Our supplies include a quantity of arsenical soap, a packet of iron tacks, and a hammer, designed for the preparation of the said skins, together with

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those of black swans, and any of the four-footed fry peculiar to this marsupial country

We take up our position in the bows of the *Alabama* when she commences her upward voyage, to look out for pelicans, and, in so doing, avoid the water which comes on board with every revolution of the paddles. The current being against us, our progress is leisurely—an accident that is favourable to us and proportionately unfavourable to the pelicans. No bag ever made would hold the big pile of game which, in the course of a couple of hours, lies heaped upon the deck. In truth, we eventually get rather ashamed of the ease with which the slaughter is effected.

The pelicans scarcely trouble to get out of the way of the boat. They are cruising about, sometimes in company, sometimes alone ; and as the noise of the paddles becomes closer, they leisurely make for one of the banks, or fly lazily into a dead tree overhanging the river. The pelican is not an elegant bird, especially when standing on the bank ; but there is a certain grace in its movements in the water, and an expression of wisdom and confiding innocence, that appeal to us for mercy, as, with neck slanting backwards, and big beak and pouch resting upon it, it pursues its harmless occupations. For myself, the quality of mercy is subject to less strain after I have acquired my seventh bird. I have killed much more than I can carry, and more than can be comfortably skinned either to-day or to-morrow.

We find that a charge of number four shot in the head of the bird is as effectual as the heavier ammunition, and that there is always time to complete the work with a second barrel if the first fails. Sometimes the dying pelican opens its strong bill—it is a foot long—and in its agony seizes the bow of the dingy when it touches the mass of white and black feathers circling in the crimson-tinged water ; but its clumsy construction renders it very defenceless.

The Firm, at Cootharaba, kindly places a first-rate four-oared boat at our disposal, and a couple of men attached to the mill undertake, not only to pilot us to the spot where we are recommended to erect our tent, but to assist us in putting it up. This is indeed a happy thought, for the day being far spent, and there being no moon, we shall have to hurry considerably if we would be under canvas by nightfall.

So, straightway, our baggage is transferred to the gig and an attendant punt, the spritsail is hoisted, and away we go across the main lake, the water rippling musically from the bows, the evening shades deepening upon the hills and darkening the forest, and all the world, so far as we can perceive it, holding a solemn silence that no one for a time cares to break. Oars are necessary to get through a narrow waterway overhung with creepers and scrub-trees and bordered with thickets of reeds in the heyday of verdant life. The sun here rarely falls upon the water, which accordingly seems black in comparison with the open sand-coloured lake over which we have sailed. While the Cootharaba saw-mills, jetty, stacks of timber, and workmen's cottages were in sight, (though before we struck sail they had diminished to Lilliputian size), we seemed to be in the society of our fellows; but this quarter of a mile of shaded waterway brings us to what is actually an arm of the main lake; it appears to us, however, to be a distinct lake hemmed in by impenetrable woods; and it induces the feeling that at last we are alone.

The sun has little of its fiery journey to complete when our gig grates upon the sandy shelf, where we land, to form camp upon a gentle eminence not more than 200 yards distant. The spot is cleared, nicely grassed, and at its back and on either side the gum forest closes in. The lakeward view, as we first look upon it, beautified with violet tints, the surface of the water unruffled as glass, fascinates us all;

and we stand upon the shore in silent admiration. But for this we have no time now. The three bales of canvas and blankets, the axes and tomahawks, the quart pots and pannikins are as speedily as may be taken up to the clearing, each working with a will. Then, the two Cootharaba men who have accompanied us shoulder their axes and disappear in search of tent-poles, while we unpack the bales, spread out the tent, and scatter the blankets abroad. Number One, by virtue of past experience in the bush, is appointed cook to the expedition ; and as, by this time, we are possessed of the hunger proverbially assigned to hunters, we watch his movements with watering mouths, and greedily listen to his theories upon frying in oil, a process in which he confesses himself an adept.

The back of the tent is protected by a gum-tree, in the fork of which one end of the sapling which forms the ridge-pole finds a secure resting-place. There is an abundance of young timber at hand, and we do not hesitate to sacrifice the strong young Eucalypti. Before we have done with them, a dozen have been felled ; and we are very proud of our tent when it is finished. The ridge and side-poles and forked uprights quite justify the confidence reposed in them : the canvas stretches admirably to its place, is firmly secured, and is finally covered by the fly which is to temper the sun's rays or keep out the rain. We walk around our habitation in the dusk, tighten a rope here and hammer in a peg there, and, surveying the whole a space or two removed, pronounce it very good. The Cootharaba men bid us good-night, and depart in their punt. I, appointed admiral of the fleet by unanimous consent, accompany them to the shore, haul up our gig, secure the painter to a log conveniently protruding from the water, carry the sail, mast, and sprit on shore, unship the rudder, and, generally speaking, make the navy ship-shape. Up the slope the camp-fire throws ruddy

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gleams upon Number One bending over his frying-pan, and Number Two surveying a steaming billy of tea through his eye-glass. The background is peopled with weird shadows which seem to dance around the snow-white tent.

Our first camp-meal is in every way a success. It is eaten outside the tent. A solitary candle emits its feeble ray within. An empty box, in which some odds and ends had been packed, is our only table, and around this we lie or lounge upon the blankets not yet arranged for the night. Each man provides his own plate, pannikin, knife and fork, according to stipulation beforehand ; and I am regarded by my comrades as disgustingly luxurious, and utterly unworthy of rank amongst bushmen, because I have taken extra pains in these matters. For example, they bring common tin ware ; my plate and cup are of enamelled metal, whose glossy black and white certainly looks gorgeous by the side of their tin goods, which never seem to be thoroughly clean, and which do not feel happy in contact with knife and fork. The disgust of Numbers One and Two is increased when the conviction is forced upon them that I have exercised a wise discretion, combining economy in the long run with superior accommodation from the outset.

The cook expects a modicum of praise for his first effort, and since Number Two and I are conscious that for the next week we are in his power, we liberally baste him with flattery. And he merits it all. He dishes up in a strip of bark a dozen potatoes, hot from the ashes, and jackets intact ; upon the regulation tin plate, crisp rashers of bacon, toasted upon pointed sticks ; in their native "can," prime sheep's tongues preserved to perfection ; and in the everlasting "billy," dark-coloured tea, than which there is no better in the world. He has learnt the true trick of brewing quart-pot tea. Every bushman is supposed to be able to make quart-pot tea, just as every household cook is supposed

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to be able to cook a mutton chop ; but in both cases it too often ends with supposition. Our tea is the correct tap—clear, fragrant, and refined.

That first camp meal is a truly regal refection. The loaf is being continually passed from hand to hand ; the savoury rashers disappear at once ; not a potato is left, and their jackets are scraped clean ; the sheeps' tongues are reduced to the last layer ; the quart pot is emptied, replenished from an outlying bucket, and boiled again in a trice. We heave sighs of repletion and content, fill our pipes and kindle them with a piece of burning stick, turn over lazily upon our blankets, and commune with the silver-pointed, deep blue dome overhead. Probably we never knew so well as now the force of the familiar words—"pipe of peace." We smoke the veritable, the real original pipe of peace, without speaking to each other. The cook breaks the spell by calls to duty.

We clean our knives and forks by sticking them in the sandy soil—a simple and easy operation which not only cleanses the implements thoroughly, but gives them a high polish and keeps the edges and points in good working condition ; arrange our blankets, two pairs each to lie upon, one pair for coverlids, and one for pillow ; and taking a final draught from the quart pot, and another long look upon the splendour of the night, settle down tired and supremely satisfied.

Number One is undoubtedly equal to his work. Daylight is faint in the tent when I awake, but the cook is out and about. The fire is blazing, and the billy on the boil. Number Two must have missed something and found it during the night, for he now lies asleep wearing his eye-glass. It is as lovely a Sunday morning as sun ever shone upon, and we resolve, barring certain works of necessity which must be performed, to observe it as a day of rest. Just as

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the sun begins to clear the dappled sky, and the first breath of morning to ruffle, as with a coming shadow, the further end of the lake, Number Two with his eye-glass strolls down to the camp fire, and joins us in paying our devotions to the quart pot. The works of necessity in which we agree to embark, and finish before breakfast, are a rearrangement of the tent, and the skinning of two pelicans shot on our passage across the main lake on the previous evening.

After breakfast, as we lounge inside the tent, flaps fastened back, breeze direct from the lake soothing us with its whisper, and a faultless prospect stretching to the verge of human vision, the measured stroke of oars travels across the water, heralding visitors from the mills. They are anxious to know if we are camped satisfactorily and whether we want anything. We do happen to want a black fellow, a piece of boiled beef, to save the trouble of cooking after a hard day's work, and some other things the need of which we have already found out. For the rest of the day we are left to our solitude, to roam into the bush and along the water's edge, and to saunter about without any object, and without wishing to have any, further than to create an appetite, which we are not long in discovering we have ready-made in season and out of season. A dreamy afternoon on the shady side of the tent, discussion of plans for the days of activity that must follow, and an hour's reading by candlelight, find us sound asleep by eight o'clock.

From this time we have no more days of idleness until we have broken up camp and are in the settlements on the other side of the lake. Once, and once only, the water-proof capabilities of our tent are tested. Wet weather more than anything else alloys the pleasure of camping out. Nothing can be more wretched than to be under canvas

during heavy rain and wind, and to realize the misery of sodden food, soaked clothes, and mud everywhere. Our tent does not let in a drop of water; the canvas, on the contrary, gets tighter, and it is a positive pleasure to hear the rain beating upon the fly, and to feel that we can bid defiance, at least for a day or so, to the elements. The weather, with the exception of this downpour, is most enjoyable. In the morning the grass is wet with dew, and the atmosphere exhilarating. Even the midday heat is June-like, and the evenings are a repetition of the mornings. There is the lake with clear, cold water, and hard sandy bottom to bathe in; the gig to sail to and fro; and some special expedition every day. The days, somehow, pass all too swiftly. Fearful of *ennui*, we have each brought something in the shape of literature, but we take it home unread; our occupations are pleasures and our pleasures occupation.

It is something to be waited upon by two rival kings. Of no lower rank are the two sable camp-followers who present themselves in response to our message to the manager yonder, if the brass-plates suspended from their necks proclaim the truth. At the mills, on our route from the sea, we had interviewed a number of aborigines encamped on the outskirts of the settlement, and without knowing it, had promised King Brown our distinguished patronage. He had accosted us, and we, not understanding him, had given him, in our opinion, an evasive answer in pigeon-English. Our friends, upon being informed that we were anxious to encourage coloured labour, thought King Brady the more suitable henchman, and then it was that his Majesty Brown advanced a prior claim, and, further, accompanied Brady to our camp, bringing a young Brownlet with him.

The men, when they come to us, are keenly alive to their

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own interests, and know how to make a bargain. They require five shillings each for their week's service, and as they can row a boat, and are familiar with the whole country-side, we determine to indulge in them as a luxury. So we send Brown's boy back again, and retain the two kings, who, on the whole, are very willing, good black fellows, and who afford us much amusement. We, of course, have to supply them with rations—flour, tea, and sugar, and meat when fits of liberality seize us. In this latter item we are again indebted to our friends at the mills, who send us by the frizzy-headed monarchs, a cut-and-come-again supply of cooked corn-beef. King Brady, the terms of the contract being decided, retires and lies down in the grass, the fact being that he is recovering from a festive orgie of the previous week. King Brown, on the other hand, prides around and into the tent, and intimates to Number One, who is an adept at pigeon-English, that a cast-off garment at the breaking-up of camp, if not at the present moment, will be well bestowed upon him.

The boat is a source of untold pleasure to our party. Without it, that *ennui* which, by anticipation, we had dreaded, would probably have been felt; with it, we are always moving without undue bodily exertion, landing whenever it suits us, and able to carry with us on our daily excursions accoutrements that would not be possible roaming in the bush. There is a roomy locker in the stern, sun and dew-proof, and comfortable sitting-room for more than double our number. She carries a serviceable jib and mainsail, leaks nothing to speak of, pulls easily, and is stiff and fast in a breeze. Often do we inquire of each other what we should have done without her. As Admiral of the Fleet, this boat is my constant care. While breakfast is preparing, I saunter down to the sandy beach, bare-footed and bare-legged, through the springy dew-drenched grass,

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wade out to her, and dry her from stem to stern ; for on these spring nights the dew falls with steady copiousness. From me, by-and-by, will issue the order, " All aboard," and to me fall the rudder-lines, Brady pulling stroke, and Brown bow oar. The guns are kept under the seat, the fishing-rods and hand-lines lie along the thwarts, the luncheons are in the locker, and off we go in a new direction every day, a merry crew to the end.

Dress, after the first day, does not trouble us. The two kings arrived at the camp in decent jackets, trousers, shirts, and hats ; but within an hour of their attachment to our fortunes they resumed their normal costume, a scanty shirt girdled round the waist. Although the convenience of this array struck us at a glance, we could not bring ourselves to imitate it, deeming that something was due from us as representatives of advanced civilization. Our Crimean shirts we accordingly retain, but leave them open at the throat ; and we remain loyal to our trousers, even if we forswear braces, and keep our boots handy to be used as required. The aborigines, sufficiently protected by their shock hair and thick skulls, go about bareheaded ; with us a broad-brimmed hat is the one thing we are very careful not to cast aside. It is a luxury, indeed, to be able to do these things, and forget the bother of studs, solitaires, collars, scarfs, wrist-bands.

The red-letter day of the camping-out is not in the common usage of the word, one of fine weather. Clouds scud across the sky in endless broken hosts ; and the bosom of the lake beyond the headland (which makes a bay of the corner upon which we are encamped) is ruffled by a stiff breeze. But our black boys assure us there will be no rain till night, and, ominous as all the appearances are to our eyes, we act upon the dictum—proof undeniable that we accept it. Our bay is out of the hurly burly which

whitens the wavelets yonder, and we make ready in the lee for a trip to the shore of the Pacific Ocean—a water-passage of some eight miles across the upper end of the large lake. Once or twice we ground, and all hands step overboard in not more than ten inches of water, and drag the gig over the shallow. Knowing that the lake is at no part in this direction more than waist-high, we feel courageous, and sail merrily along. No dishonest person will interfere with the boat and its contents; within a radius of ten miles there is not probably a living soul but ourselves. In confidence, therefore, we secure the painter to a tree, and wade ashore.

A tramp through a weary mile and a half of marsh, where the black slosh is knee-deep, and the reedy grass rank and very suggestive of leeches and other aquatic vermin, brings us to a sandy ridge. Here the aspect of the country entirely changes. The ragged-barked ti-trees, characteristic of the dismal Australian swamp, give place to shrub and tree that please the eye as much as the growths of the swamp repelled it. The roar of the Pacific informs us that we are nearing the beach; so do the big white lilies, bold and beautiful in the midst of their glossy leaves, the native breadfruit-trees, and the plentiful mesembryanthemum, creeping over and covering the white sand with its fleshy stems and yellow or mauve blossoms newly opened to greet a passing hour of sunshine.

The Pacific has a hoarseness in its tone, and spatters us with its flying foam flakes. The gulls, terns, cormorants, and oyster-catchers wheel, scream, and dip into the surf, shooting upwards with that well-known slanting, airy, fairy movement which is so much suggestive of exquisite enjoyment; and we cannot bring ourselves to use the guns which weighed so heavily in the dismal swamp, though stewed oyster-catcher would make a welcome variation to our camp bill of fare. Leagues right and left the hard, sandy beach

trends, and before us gloomily rolls the measureless expanse of ocean. Our black fellows are animated by no sentiment, and, instead of posing in an attitude, surveying with poetical eye the truly grand scene, search for a bivalve called, in the aboriginal tongue, Yugarie, a member of the mussel family, in much esteem by fishermen as bait, and by the natives as a *bonne bouche* which makes the sea-side tolerable. To us this trudge across the dismal swamps and sandy ridge signifies a final spectacle of great, if melancholy, grandeur ; to Kings Brown and Brady it means a heavy feed on Yugarie. They have brought a quart pot for the purpose and when we are summoned to the fire which they have kindled under a breadfruit-tree (not the serviceable South Sea Island breadfruit, but the rugge.l variety, *pandanus*), they have in readiness, in addition to the billy of tea, a steaming and savoury pile of their favourite shell-fish.

At certain seasons of the year these lakes are covered with black swans, wild duck, and teal ; and parties go out to capture the cygnets before they are strong enough to fly. Hundreds of black swans are killed, shot, or knocked on the head, for the sake of the breast, which is covered with a fine down. The black swan is not so regal in bearing, nor in any way so majestic, as its tame brother ; but it is a fine bird nevertheless, and in its sable garb, relieved by scarlet bill and cere, and white undertrimmings to the wings, sits and moves upon the water with a gracefulness all its own. Occasionally the swans leave these Noosa lakes for a season or two, and they are absent now for the first time for seven years. We see, perhaps, only a dozen pairs, and they are evidently breeding, as are the ducks, of which we accordingly shoot not more than what we absolutely require for table purposes.

The most remunerative sport, I may here mention, is with the fishing-rod. My first venture is a fat spotted eel, of five

pounds' weight, caught with gut bottom and small hook. Catfish of equal weight we catch in abundance. spite of the frequent assertion that these slimy, ugly creatures are admirable eating, we cannot bring ourselves to use them ; but they afford a treat to the kings, who cook them to a turn in the ashes and gorge upon them. The black fellow is a natural sportsman : Brady after one lesson can tell, by the working of the top of the rod, whether catfish, eel, or bream is coming up, and should the lethargic movements be of the former, his white teeth stand out like tombstones. The bream are very plentiful, and they yield excellent sport.

We often pull across to the shaded waterway previously referred to, moor the boat to a broad-leaved cotton-tree, smoke our pipes, listen to the scrub birds, give Brown and Brady permission to roam the forest in quest of 'possums or any feasible game, and catch bream *ad libitum*, frequently giving up from sheer surfeit. The bream, however, are not nice to eat. They are the black bream, which in salt, or even in brackish water eat white, firm, and sweet ; here, where the water is fresh, they are flabby and tasteless. The eels, however, and the whiting are well flavoured ; and as Number One, at fish-cooking, is as sound in practice as in theory, we are seldom without a dish of fish wherewith to flank our cold meats and bread.

During our stay in the district, I learn a good deal of its timber resources. In Queensland there are 230 known timber-yielding trees, and amongst the most important is the *Dammara robusta*, commonly known as the Noosa pine. One day I accept the invitation of the resident partner in the Firm to ride up into the scrub and see the habitat of the tree by which the district is becoming famous.

We ride, first over sandy country ; then over black, treacherous, clayey land ; next over sandy loam where the bracken thrives luxuriantly ; soon we cross a creek, on the

further side of which, as is the frequent rule here, the character of the country changes. It is a change for the better, as trees and grass signify.

The open forest, as we near the scrub, is gay with long-stemmed yellow flowers, and watered by creeks whose courses are marked by dense, dark foliage, and sometimes made known by odours from climbing plants and native shrubs, meeting us a quarter of a mile off. For the first time I see the wild honeysuckle of the colony, a parasite on the Swamp Mahogany, bearing a red honeysuckle-looking flower. On the creek-margin there is a shrub spangled with jessamine-like blooms. Quail rise out of the grass, and dart straight away with musical whirr. Blue mountaineer parrots call shrill in the windy tree-tops. We ride into ravines rich with ferns. There are five-and-twenty square miles of this good forest land, but it is surrounded by country hopelessly impoverished with wallum brush, though, like other worthless soil, it grows wild flowers in unusual numbers and variety.

Through a narrow bridle-path we by-and-by enter a darkly shaded scrub, five miles deep. Dense thickets of prickly growth, the lawyer-cane predominating, forbid divergence from the path without the aid of a tomahawk. Damp, cool mosses and beautiful ferns spring out of fissures at the tree-roots. The Firm is absolute owner or leaseholder of this grand district. Its members were its pioneers in days when the Wide Bay blacks were fiercely hostile. Not far from the scrub in which we are riding in Indian file, my companion, years ago, was kept prisoner for four-and-twenty hours in a hut surrounded by blacks lying in wait for his appearance but afraid to face his rifle. Those days of peril are gone never to return, and the timber-getters follow their callings in peace.

Through the festoons of vines and other creepers which make the scrub so funereal and cool, I espy a stately, round,

smooth, straight, brown column, eighteen feet or thereabouts in circumference, and rising high above all surroundings. It is the Noosa pine. The eye follows this apparently finished piece of gigantic lathe work, seventy feet upwards, without a break or fault of any description, until it rests upon the branches of its head. We dismount, and, without moving from one spot, can count twelve of these grand pine-trees. One is a patriarch that cannot be less than twelve feet in diameter at the butt. The barrel is somewhat short in proportion, the branches, so far as one can judge, being not more than sixty feet from the ground. These columns are of solid timber, and they taper very little; the wood is free from knots, handsomely marked, and capable of taking a high polish. It is largely used in Queensland, and exported to the other colonies for linings to houses—an important consideration, indeed, in a country which has not emerged from the wooden era of architecture. I have seen furniture made of Noosa pine equal in richness of marking to the finest bird's-eye maple.

## CHAPTER XI.

## A DAY WITH KANGAROOS.

BEFORE the tablecloth had been removed I had learned to look upon the kangaroo as a downright pest in the thriving colony of Queensland. The talk had been of its ravages upon our host's pastures, and we had been all amused at the production, by one of the company, of an advertisement clipped from an English newspaper, designed to attract emigrants to the colony, and concluding with the words in capital type letters, "Liberty and Kangaroos!" Other attractions had been offered to the working-men of the old country, but this last line, set out in conspicuous isolation, was evidently intended as a clincher. Kangaroos, indeed! That worthy Scotchman, our squatter host, hospitable to a fault, and shrewd as even a North Briton could be, was full of the subject from quite another point of view. Kangaroos were no attraction to *him*.

"The emigrant agent at home," he said, helping himself to another banana, "seems to think the kangaroo a blessing. We, unfortunately, know it to be a curse. I have gone closely into the figures of the whole question, and can prove to you that every 1000 kangaroos rob 2000 sheep of grass, and this, at the present rate of wool, means a loss of 400*l.* every year.

"But," said a member of the Legislative Assembly—snacking to sudden death a bloodthirsty mosquito that had

settled on the back of his hand, and was rapidly filling out until its small body resembled a bead of crimson glass—"but the Government are taking the question up. They have passed a bill according to which ninepence will be paid for every kangaroo scalp and sixpence for every wallaby."

"Aye, and that is very good so far as it goes," rejoined the master, "but I was taught in dear auld Aberdeenshire that the best way to do a thing is to do it yourself. Why, sir, last month we had a three days' battue, and killed 3000 marsupials, and if we have luck we shall shoot our thousand head to-morrow."

And, in truth, a very pleasant prospect it was. None of your wearisome walking for hours over mountain and glen for the bare glimpse of a stag which winds you every time you get within range. None of the perils of the tiger-hunt in Indian jungles. Nay, none of the sickening brutality of the fashionable pigeon match. Here was an almost certainty of safe, plentiful sport, and, withal, the consciousness that you were all the time doing a work of necessity, and giving assistance to a worthy man whose theory in life had always been that heaven loves to help them who help themselves.

A loss of 400*l.* every year? Well might one of us, as we went out to the verandah to smoke our pipes, gaze at the lovely purple tints stealing over the mountains, and become dreamy as the glorious stars of the southern hemisphere came out almost simultaneously with the sunset, exclaim, in the words of a never-forgotten favourite, "'Four hundred pounds! Ma conscience!'"

Our friend Cameron was adopting a wise course. The colony was in the midst of a terrible drought. Riding up to Glenlorne—the Australian colonies abound with sheep and cattle-runs bearing the name of some well-remembered scene of home—I had seen bullocks perishing and perished

for lack of food and water, dying, perhaps, in the oozy mud of a nearly dried-up waterhole, having insufficient strength to extricate themselves. The heavens were as brass, the earth as iron. The grass was yellow, and dry as tinder, and ugly fissures were gaping in the parched earth. In the course of six hours I passed a dozen bush-fires. At such a time the kangaroos, driven from their mountain retreats, had advanced boldly to the haunts of civilization, and were, as the saying went, "eating up the country."

With a good heart, therefore, I uprose at dawn, and joined the band of hunters gathered for an organized attack on the enemy. To the half-a-dozen of us who were Cameron's guests at Glenlorne were now added neighbours, who had ridden in from a radius of twenty miles. In that sparsely populated country, where one man's possession is as large as an English county, the muster would not be much even if it included the whole population; but we found ourselves twenty-five strong of armed men, and, what with black fellows and small settlers, there were between forty and fifty beaters on horseback.

What a hullabaloo there was, as we foregathered in the home paddock! Dogs were barking, men shouting, and there was much running to and fro. One man wanted a strap, another a length of greenhide to repair broken gear. The laughing jackasses in the scrub beyond the vineyard cachinnated one against the other, as only those comical birds can do. The pretty little blue-mountain parrots, flashing green, blue, and orange, screamed in their rapid flight overhead. Still higher, like pure white flecks against the serene blue of the cloudless sky, the cockatoos flocked to raid upon the Indian corn of some poor husbandman. The magpie fluted sweetly from the three gum-trees by the milking-yard. Far as the eye could reach, far as it would have reached had its powers been doubled, stretched the

free forest of the Australian bush, with patches of clearing here and there ; and, for the horizon, there were mountain-ranges upon which the gauzy drapery of the night-mists still lightly hovered. Words altogether fail to describe the sense of absolute freedom and delight felt by the healthy man at such a moment. His strength seems renewed like the eagle's. His chest expands as he draws a deep, sound breath, and thanks God that he is alive and that the world is so fair.

We had to reach those mountains and take up our position upon the ridges and the spurs thereof. The beaters were to operate on the intervening flats and drive the game upwards. It was my privilege to accompany both parties ; to ride away with the beaters, and afterwards join the firing-party. The beaters, having a *détour* to accomplish, started first. We mounted, not in hot haste, but with the orderly leisure of men who wished to be thorough. In the bush you must learn to be your own groom when occasion requires ; to catch your horse, bridle and saddle it, and mount with never a boy at its head holding the off-stirrup ready. In time the new chum becomes fond of doing so, and feels a pride in seeing for himself that the saddle-cloth (often a simple piece of blanket) and girths are in order, and the bit and bridle comfortably disposed ; also in being able, nimbly and safely, to mount a restless animal. Not one horse of our squadron had been stabled or groomed or corn-fed for many a day. Not one of the beaters wore coat or braces. The shirt and trowsers, belt, and broad-brimmed hat, leggings, and more often one spur than two, completed the equipment, always adding the everlasting stock-whip.

Under the orders of our "boss," we in due time spread out over four or five miles of country, with instructions to make as much noise as we could after a certain interval had

elapsed. The country over which we had to beat was more or less closely timbered, and there were small belts of scrub from which we knew there would be plenty of game to be dislodged. The general plan was to advance in a semi-circular line, so as to drive the marsupials towards a particular ridge for which they would be sure to make.

Within a mile of the home paddock behold them—kangaroos, wallabies, and even kangaroo rats—enjoying their morning meal. Perhaps I should say we beheld them disturbed at their morning meal, for their large pricked ears already betrayed a mild alarm. They had heard the crackling of dead branches as we rode towards them, and were discovered sitting on their haunches with their heads erect, and with one consent looking towards us. When the stock-whips began to crack, and the voices to resound far and near, they remained no more upon the order of their going, but went. You could see them bounding over the open spaces in their queer, half-upright position, with long balancing tails outstretched, and hear the dead wood creaking in the bits of scrub. The beaters were, as per instructions, first to advance at a walk, and only to begin the business in earnest when two shots, fired in quick succession from the ridge, gave the signal.

By taking a short cut, calculating my time, and using the spurs, I was able to keep company for a short distance with the beaters, and yet come up with the gunners, before the first shot was fired on the ridge. Guided by Billy Barlow, a black fellow belonging to the station, this proved to be a most rousing gallop for a man who had previously had little experience of bush-life. Over fallen logs, down steep slopes, threading through the forest, now crouching upon the horse's neck to avoid a branch that would have brained you on the spot; now brushing past gum-tree trunks that it seemed impossible to avoid, Billy led the way at high racing

speed, his legs and arms rivalling a windmill in motion, and his high-pitched whoop acting better than the sharpest spur upon the spirits of the plucky horses. Where the black fellow went I was bound to follow, and, drawing rein at the ridge, he showed his white teeth as the central feature of a beaming smile, and with an air of ineffable self-conceit chuckled, "That good fellow gallop, my word. Eh ? "

Transferred now to the command of the leader of the firing-party, a huge ironbark-tree was assigned as my station, from which I was not to move. Moreover, as there was another sportsman 200 yards to the right, and another 200 yards to the left, the necessity of firing reasonably straight ahead was impressed upon me, as upon the rest. The little time to spare I employed in strolling along the line. The sportsmen were supremely happy. Those who had breechloaders had heaped their cartridges conveniently at the foot of the tree, and fondled their weapons, lauding pinfire or central fire according to their respective possessions. The owners of muzzle-loaders, amongst which were some antique specimens that I should have trembled to discharge, were a little damped by the obvious disadvantage under which they laboured, but were nevertheless eager and cheery, flattering themselves in one or two instances, with some reason too, that their guns were warranted to kill harder than the newer fashion.

At last the double-shotted signal rang out clear. The gunners stood to arms. The whips and shouts of the beaters could at first scarcely be heard, but they soon grew nearer. Acting under orders, we allowed the odd kangaroos composing the straggling advance-guard to go by unhurt, and ought to have kept quiet until another double shot from our head-centre told us when to begin. But the kangaroos

came on in such numbers that we were not to be restrained, and soon a fusilade worthy of a battlefield was opened. "Aim low, and single out your kangaroo," was, of course, the motto.

With small flocks of from four to a dozen bounding in a body towards you, the temptation to blaze at random into their midst was almost irresistible; but a few misses taught you the folly of the proceeding. It turned out to be a splendid drive. Hundreds of kangaroos rushed towards and past us. Some came on after being hit and fell, struggling but not killed, within a few yards of our posts. Others were literally rolled over and over down the ridge, until stopped by bush or tree. Rather than miss a chance, I fear some of us shot towards each other, eager to bring down the game as it was abreast us. I can answer for a rattling of spent shot on the tree beyond me, and the next man to the right more than hinted that some of my charges might be found in the bark of a eucalyptus not a hundred miles from where he stood. Whereupon we mutually congratulated each other upon our good fortune, and promised to behave better for the future.

The beaters had at last done their work, and were near us. Then only the file-firing ended. My first business when it ceased was to pick up a stick and despatch two unfortunate kangaroos whose hind-legs had been broken, and who were in a pitiable state of disablement some twenty yards off. The poor creatures, inoffensive in all things except their natural appetites for the food provided for them, looked up with such liquid beautiful eyes, full of distress and pleading, that for a time I dared not put them out of their pain. It did seem terribly cruel, but, alas! that loss of 400*l.* a year, and the remembrance of havoc amongst the cultivated acres of selectors to whom the loss of even 400*s.* would be a most serious matter, appeared to

justify this wholesale taking of life. Still, the consciousness that we were doing a work of necessity for our squatter friend, and for the frugal selector and his family, could not put me wholly at ease in the face of that reproachful glance. It was the one drawback to a day's exciting sport.

During the day we had three drives similar to this, but none quite equal in results. That first drive had wrought wholesale slaughter. The breechloaders had naturally given the best account of the foe. Some of the gun-barrels became too hot to touch. One expert at the work, never moving from his appointed stand, had fired fifty cartridges, and shot forty-three marsupials. The lowest number killed by a gun was eight. How around each tree the empty cartridges lay strewed; how all along the ridge the smell of gunpowder and wreaths of smoke pervaded the air; how black fellows and boys with sharp knives whipped off the scalps of the slain, carefully leaving the ears attached, and strung them together; how the begrimed barrels were cleaned out, perspiring faces mopped, and incidents exchanged over happy pipes, as we lay prone upon the ground for a brief spell previous to starting afresh, let the reader imagine for himself.

Of the kangaroo tribes which fell that day there numbered 921, and of animals wounded to die in lingering pain or to recover as best they could, there must have been a great quantity. The B.B. shot scatters wide with most guns, and out of a flying group of half-a-dozen, probably not one would escape without a pellet. The number of animals driven before our beaters was incredibly great, and I was not at all surprised to hear afterwards that upon another station in the same district 23,000 kangaroos were shot during one year. Upon the day with which we have been concerning ourselves some of the rarer species were found amongst the slain. It

is said that in Australasia there are between twenty and thirty kinds of kangaroo. The varieties which we secured were, first, the common kangaroo, and the largest, which was what the colonials term an "old man" kangaroo, was much above the average. Sitting upright he would have been nearly six feet high, and his big tapering tail could not have weighed less than fourteen pounds. Secondly, came the smaller wallabies, of which there were three kinds, namely—the common scrub wallaby, the rock wallaby, which is darker in colour and more handsome, and there was one black wallaby, so scarce that it was next day despatched to one of the other colonies for preservation in a museum. Thirdly, we had a few paddy-melons, a still smaller variety than the wallaby; fourthly, a brace of kangaroo rats; and lastly one wallaroo.

Touching the rats, they must have been accidentally shot; as their scalps do not bring a bonus, and they are no bigger than a wild rabbit, no one would think of knowingly wasting a shot upon them. The wallaroo is quite another affair. This is the most valuable example of the order *Marsupialia*. It inhabits mountainous districts and is seldom found. The fur is a rich dark brown, and fetches a high price. The specimen amongst our spoil must have wandered from its native haunts in error, and Billy Barlow was not wrong in applying to him the term "boomer," which, all through the colonies, signifies something preternaturally large. Thus a polite youth will inform a friend who has drawn a very long bow, not that he has told a wicked falsehood, but a down-right boomer.

It seemed a pity to leave so many carcases lying on the ground to be the food of carion birds, voracious ants, and prowling dingoes, but in a country where the scarcity of labour is a huge difficulty meeting the colonist at every turn, it would not pay even to remove the skins. Yet the fur, chosen at the right time of the year, makes a most

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serviceable rug, and the most comfortable boots I have ever worn were made of kangaroo leather. The meat is held of little account. Wallaby haunch jugged, or the whiter paddy-melon curried, make a welcome change to salt beef from the harness cask; and the tail of the large kangaroo has a certain fame for soup, although one hears more about it at home than in the land of the marsupials. Some day, no doubt, the hundreds of thousands of skins that may be secured every year will find their value. At present they are virtually wasted, though the value of the leather is slowly becoming better known.

The reader may now form some idea of a day's sport at the Antipodes. Not the least pleasant feature was our halt for luncheon. The spot selected was a thick scrub into which even the fierce sun which made the glass register  $100^{\circ}$  in the shade could not penetrate. Of bread and damper there was no stint; cold boiled beef, in joints and pieces of the cut-and-come-again order, was plentiful. Tea, strong, fragrant, and sweet, we brewed in buckets over the camp fire, and drank without milk, after the fashion of all orthodox bushmen, dipping our pannikins, which each man had brought strapped to his saddle, into the common pail.

Our sheath-knives were our sole cutlery, and crockery-ware troubled us not. Talk of lord mayor's feasts! Blessed indeed would be lord mayors, aldermen, and all people committed to their charge if they could relish their food as we relished that unpretentious repast in the Australian forest. True, there were a few mosquitoes about. One venerable gentleman leaped with surprising agility to his feet after being nipped rudely by the forceps of a bulldog-ant upon which he had innocently sat; and attention, as the feast drew near its close, was called to a disagreeable-looking iguana over a yard long, which had been watching us from one of the upper branches of a tree, and which

dropped very dead to a salute from Billy Barlow's single-barrelled gun. Billy carefully selected certain fatty portions to which he had in his piccaninny days been taught to ascribe almost supernatural curative powers.

With the breaking up of the drought, I may mention as a postscript, the plague of marsupials moderated, but as the bonuses for scalps were also reduced in value the energetic measures which had been entered into for the destruction of kangaroos were allowed to lapse. The natural timidity of the animal as a rule ensures its retreat before civilization, and the colonist who does not travel into the bush sees but little of the singular animal which so astonished Captain Cook and his merry men. But the danger from the millions of marsupials which still exist is such that in some badly-infested districts the landholders were not long since warned by the local authorities that if they did not destroy them they would be destroyed by officially-employed men at their (the landholders') expense. Pastoral lessees should adopt Sandy Cameron's principles, for, at Glenlorne, the nuisance was, after my visit, reduced to a minimum by his vigorous onslaughts, made on that grand self-help principle which has given him a fortune beyond the dreams of avarice.

## CHAPTER XII.

## ON A CATTLE-STATION.

THE morning of Boxing-day was raw and cold ; a fact quite deserving of mention, because two days earlier, travelling in the train from Brisbane to eat our Christmas dinner with friends on the Darling Downs, we had experienced great heat ; had run into a magnificent thunderstorm at the foot of the mountains ; ascended the range with lovely rose-coloured lightning revealing the ravines and far-away woods ; and finished the journey to Toowoomba with the accompaniment of muttered thunder and fading flashes in the west. It was one of those days when you might naturally wonder whether it was possible ever to be cool again. Yet the grateful thunderstorm had effectually cleared the atmosphere, and the Christmas holidays were, in all parts of the southern half of the colony, most enjoyable.

Upon the Darling Downs, some 2000 feet above the level of the sea, it was a little more than cool, and I was roused out of bed before daylight on Boxing-day morning to indulge in the novel sensation of a shiver and moral cowardice in the bath-room. My host, however, was a man who never allowed any one time for shivering, and in the very grey dawn—at that time, with a dull day, shortly before six o'clock—the buggy-wheels crunched upon the gravel, and the horses stood pawing at the foot of the steps. From a ridge, divided from us by a long valley, in which the town of Toowoomba lay sleeping and hidden, the mountain mists rolled in volumes, saturating all they

touched as effectually as if they were real rain, instead of wreaths of soft wool driven before the wind. It looked a most unpromising day for travelling, but B. would hear of no shirking, and peremptorily ordered me into the buggy. The bay horse reared in impatience, the brown mare thrust herself into the collar, and we were off, speeding swiftly over the sandy road, and not a glimpse of sun to cheer with the promise of warmth.

Soon we were at the verge of the table-land, and twelve miles out we were upon the plains 700 feet lower than the point from which we had started, the wheels clogged with the rich black soil, the horses sweating, but spinning easily along. Miles upon miles of greyish green plains, with intervening ranges, and dotted with clumps of scrub, opened to view as the gradual descent was made ; the cattle and sheep looked wonderingly up from their glittering pastures ; blue mountain-parrots flew overhead, and the horizon was a boundary of shadowy mountain-barriers. The plain here bore a distinct and sudden peak or rounded hill ; there the wooded spurs encroached upon the level, and saved it from being monotonous. B. had prophesied that the chilly mists and forbidding clouds would prove peculiar to the higher land—were, in fact, of distinctly mountain birth. And so they proved to be ; for once fairly upon the plains, the sun appeared, and we were glad to throw aside our ulsters.

It was heavy travelling. The thunderstorms had brought the creeks down in a very decent imitation of flood, and the black soil was a paste that clung to wheel and hoof with leech-like pertinacity. The first stage was to be done by the bay and brown pair, town horses that were taken back next day by the groom in sorry condition. For six or seven miles they were plunging through water knee-deep ; and through one marshy flat there ran a rapid stream out

of which we put up probably a couple of hundred black ducks. This stream turned out to be the road-track, converted for the time into a channel for the rain-water draining from higher ground beyond.

Of this kind of splashy travelling we had some twelve miles ; and when at length we emerged from the swamps, and approached the station where horses were to be changed, the bonny bay no longer pawed the ground and arched his neck. A portion of this station was fenced with wallaby-proof fence—a high, close paling, reminding one of an English park, and that cost from 80*l.* to 100*l.* per mile. It was rendered necessary by the numerous marsupials that infested the scrubs, within which the fence confined them. At the station a civilized aboriginal, trusty and smart as any white man could be, with the head stockman from the run of which B. was part proprietor, awaited us with six horses, by which, turn and turn about, we were to complete the journey. Here we plucked luscious figs from a beautiful garden, and took a hasty luncheon with the owner of the station.

The station buggy into which we were now transferred was a strong vehicle, built especially for mountain and bush travelling ; a compound of the ordinary Abbot buggy and an American express waggon. How it survived the journey was wonderful to my eyes, and that a month or two afterwards it broke down occasioned me no surprise. The jolting was something to remember. B. was a masterly whip, and from the first I had confidence in him, else that drive to and from his station would have been a period of terror. His theory was that, come weal or come woe, it was the correct thing to keep the horses going, especially down the side of a mountain, into and out of a gully or creek ; and to let them know from the start that the responsibility was theirs. Crashing through underwood, grazing trees in the bush, thrown sometimes a foot high in

the air, swerving around sharp curves in precipitous passes and always rattling on at full speed, we pulled up at sunset, having travelled seventy-five miles. It was enjoyable in so far that the driving was good, the scenery of the mountains magnificent, and the constant change of country novel. At one broad creek in flood we were piloted over by a cattle-driver who fortunately happened to have ridden through just before our arrival, and on our return journey, when the waters were down, we plainly saw that, had we diverged a yard from the line taken by our guide, we should have had to swim for it. The horses we were using were grass-fed, had been caught wild, by the horse-hunter of a previous chapter, and broken-in upon the station, but nothing could exceed their endurance or intelligence.

After a stage of eight miles, we halted. The spare horses, which had all the while been running loose close to the buggy, would stop simultaneously, and feed around until the stockman and his assistant had ridden up and dismounted. Then the animals in harness were allowed to go at large, and another pair substituted. It never occurred to one of these horses to run away. Of their own accord, rather, they cantered along with the buggy, sometimes behind, sometimes by the side when the bush was sufficiently open, and occasionally a few yards ahead. They seemed to be inspired by the energy of my companion, and answered his call as if they were creatures of reason. I cannot say how the driver felt at the end of his seventy miles' work with whip, rein, and voice; for myself, I went into the station where we were to spend the night, as a man would feebly walk who had been beaten with many stripes.

It was sweet at even-tide to lie in the verandah hammock, and watch the stars reflected, twinkle and all, in the lagoons, and hear the melancholy cry of the stone plover, the contented quack-quack of the wild duck, and the distant howl of the dingo. The station was the only habitation

within leagues. B. and I alone of the company—our young host and his wife and baby had never been to the old country—could talk of what Boxing-night meant at Drury Lane and the other London theatres, and compare the scenes with which we were both familiar with our present exceeding solitude in the Queensland bush.

The next day was in the nature of a holiday. B., as Member for the district, was patron of some local races at a bush township fourteen miles distant, and that was the extent of our travel. Not sorry was I; nor sorry could have been the horses, which were rubbed down, and turned into a paddock to enjoy themselves. I had not previously seen how horse-racing was conducted in the bush, far from any township larger than a village, and was curious to acquire the experience. Till then, I should not have thought it possible for this class of amusement to be harmless. It was the pleasantest spectacle imaginable; a Sunday-school might have attended it without evil. It was conducted throughout from a genuine and innocent love of sport, and was almost Arcadian in its simple surroundings.

The township was of the orthodox bush pattern, only, perhaps, prettier in its surroundings than usual. There were a courthouse and the residence of the police magistrate, who is always the leading inhabitant; two hotels, a store, post and telegraph-office, and scattered wooden houses for the accommodation of the few hundreds of people forming the population. But there was an exceptional amount of village green between the higher and lower portions, and the flocks of geese and rooting pigs roaming at large imparted an old-country appearance to it. The racecourse was a mile and a half outside the township, and approached by a primitive track. It was a rude but good course for such races as were run—an oval cleared in the forest, with no railings or fence, but fairly level, and with no dangerously sharp turnings. There were no stands, grand or otherwise;

and the judge's box was a homely sort of movable pulpit shaded with canvas and boughs of she-oak. From the neighbouring stations, within a radius of a score of miles, the stockmen and shepherds came in, in many cases to enjoy the one holiday of the year, all on horseback, with their dirtiest cabbage-tree hats—in the bush, the nearest approach to full dress—best Garibaldi shirts, and unapproachable moleskins and boots. Servant-girls cantered in, proud in their habits and feathers. The selector drove up his family in spring cart or dray, but the rule was for everybody to be mounted. Before the sheep-bell rang for the first race, you might see small boys and laughing girls galloping over the course, and at the tail of such a squadron I saw an old woman of sixty-five lashing her rough pony into a canter.

The lady riders during the races massed together on horseback under a clump of trees ; the gentlemen galloped madly amongst the timber, cutting off corners, with the view of seeing as much of the running as possible. There was no disorder, no audible betting. The only drunken man I saw during the day was a black fellow upon a wild, long-legged horse, and he, having been once a trooper in the native police, caused great amusement by patrolling up and down with drunken gravity for hours together, fancying he was on duty, keeping his horse at a sharp walk, and as often as not leaning over its mane in fitful slumber. And the racing itself was excellent. The horses and riders were all known, and the contests were *bond fide* trials of strength.

After a night's rest in a most comfortable hotel, where the mosquito curtains, for a wonder, were without holes, and where a print of one of Rolf's incomparable angling pictures, and a coloured representation of punt-fishing in the Thames, hung in the dining-room, we resumed our rapid journey. The country was still partly mountainous, and there were several creeks to ford. By one o'clock we had left our thirty miles behind us, and were at the head-station, which for a while

was to be home. It was a new kind of country to me, more picturesque than any I had seen before. In Queensland you can, indeed, get every kind of country ; and here the distinctive features were the silver-leaf ironbark, and ridges, alternating with fertile flats, covered with the fattening blue grass. It is known as first-class pastoral land, and amongst the best for cattle that the colony possesses.

After a long day's travel, during which you have not seen a human being, and scarcely a sign of animal life as you swept through the everlasting forest, the squatter's house, surrounded by its patches of maize and miscellaneous cultivation, and flanked by its outbuildings and enclosures, is welcome. On this occasion it was welcome in the extreme. There were the fruit-trees in the garden ; here, a solitary enclosure sacred to the lonely dead ; beyond, a disused shearing-shed ; then the workman's huts, each with a few peach-trees shading the roof ; and finally the big house, surrounded by vines and figs, crowning an eminence.

The faithful horses, running loose, recognized the end of their journey ; reeking in sweat as they were, they set off up the slope as lively as kittens ; and the pair in the buggy did not require their driver's "Now, then ; home, boys !" to make a final effort and take us up flying. The house commanded a fine view of cultivated flat, covered with the dark green maize, of which there was one fenced-in patch of twenty-one unbroken acres ; or with the quick-growing lucerne, which in this country yields four crops per year. Sheep, cattle, and horses grazed across the creek ; and beyond the flat the iron-bark ridges rose terrace-like till they terminated the prospect. From the verandah, whose blinds were the foliage of a large *wistaria*, one never tired of studying such a pastoral picture as this ; so wide, so suggestive of dropping fatness, so many-featured, so bright under sunshine, so dreamy and mysterious at the too short transformation occasioned by the tints of sunset.

The run, upon which I was to see life amongst cattle, was in the mountains, where the air was balmy and cool, and where the spirits rose high. Night gave sound sleep; morning brought a natural hilarity and elasticity that made you ready to do and dare anything. Day gave no unbearable heat, nor mosquitoes, nor the lassitude common at times on the lower lands of the coast. Evening found us returning from our expeditions with wolfish appetites and pleasant weariness that many a jaded London man would gladly purchase at high price. The more I saw of the colonies, the better can I understand—what at first seemed wholly unexplainable—why, after a few years' experience of the free patriarchal life of which this cattle-run was a type, people who can afford to live in the centres of the world's highest civilization, and command all the comforts and luxuries of the old country, prefer—actually and deliberately prefer—the independence and limitless elbow-room of these quiet, sunny, remote pasture-lands.

To be sure, the quiet is now and then broken. For example, on the afternoon of my arrival at the station, while we were dozing in the shade, a fearful hubbub arose amongst the tame blacks who were allowed to erect their gunyahs and keep camp near the slaughter-yard, about 300 yards beyond the stables. The mailman had indiscreetly, and in defiance of the law which prohibits a supply of liquor to aborigines, left a bottle of rum as he rode by, and three or four of the black-fellows, wrought to madness, had seized their weapons, and put their camp in an uproar.

Gins were yelling and cutting into the fray with sticks; knives, nullahs, spears, and tomahawks were gleaming, blood was flowing, and the place was a Pandemonium, when my friend's partner, his superintendent, and a couple of stockmen rushed upon the scene, laying about right and left, and finally quelling the disturbance. We watched a hideous gin binding up the wounds of an old warrior who was badly

gashed, and shrilly rating him as he lay prostrate on a sheet of bark ; and though there was no further fighting, we could hear, for a couple of hours or so, intermittent yells and jabbering. But this was a novel episode. The blacks in the settled districts, are generally quiet and harmless, and attached to the station and its owners, who treat them kindly, exercising a paternal supervision over them.

Young men coming to the colonies to enter into pastoral pursuits never live down their hatred of sheep-farming, nor their fondness for cattle. The movements of the latter are naturally more lively, and the operations incident to their breeding make more demands upon the manly qualities which bushmen prize. Scores of highly-born and bred men live by droving cattle, involving, it may be, a journey of hundreds of miles through unknown country. The drover, or "overlander," has a twofold object : to bring his herd to its destination without loss, and in good marketable condition. To do this requires generalship, endurance, knowledge, and patience, and a certain instinct that with many seems to be inborn, enabling them to steer a direct course where others would be hopelessly lost. The trip of the brothers Jardine from Rockhampton to Cape York has thus become historical in the annals of settlement in Queensland.

What shearing is to the sheep-stations, mustering is to the cattle-run, namely, the chief operation of the year. We had some "fine times" at this business. After breakfast, solid and plentiful, and despatched close upon sunrise, a general movement would be made to the horse-yard, into which perhaps twenty horses had been driven from the paddock. The horses for the day having been selected, the remainder would be turned out again. Saddling came next, each man attending to his own wants. We made quite an imposing cavalcade at starting. By-and-by we should be distributed on special duties, ordered by the head stockman,

who was commander-in-chief ; but we set out from headquarters in a body : to wit, my friend and his co-partner ; the head stockman and his invaluable henchman, Paddy, the black-fellow ; four lively young gentlemen, sons of the partners, home from the metropolitan grammar-school for the Christmas Midsummer holidays ; the superintendent and myself ; and an odd boy or two caracollying in the rear and on general outpost duty. How the regular station folks, to whom these expeditions occurred as the routine of daily work, felt was not told ; I felt young again, as if no silver threads were being woven ; in short, as if I was as much a boy as those wide-awake holiday-keepers from the grammar-schools. But then, the sky was so high and clear ; the morning air so bracing ; the country so verdant. Like the horses, I wanted to be off at more fiery haste than a quick walk, and would fain have cleaved the air like the eagle flying overhead.

There were two musters in the year for branding the young calves, and creating as many fat bullocks for the future as could be obtained. Every five or six years there was a general muster technically termed square-tailing, the object being to ascertain the precise number of cattle upon the station, and compare tails with the book entries. Owners of cattle-runs at this period were not in very hopeful mood. Bullocks which three years before were fetching eight pounds per head could not now be sold for half the amount, and men who had been sailing near the wind, and entering upon pastoral pursuits in too speculative a spirit, were in a condition not to be envied ; balance at bank overdrawn, markets glutted, and little immediate prospect of better times.

Our first expedition was to cut out the cows and calves of a large mob driven in from a distant part of the run to a "camp" about six miles from the station. Very exciting and pretty work it was. The youths and myself were

stationed around the camp—an open space in the forest, where the trees were enough for shade, but not too many for free movement ; and it seemed to me that when the business of our department was slack, we occasionally allowed a cow and calf to escape for the express purpose of riding after them. Be that as it might, there was plenty of hard galloping for the head stockman and his assistants in the thick of the herd, twisting and doubling after the particular animal they had fixed upon, and performing splendid feats of horsemanship in the pursuit. The horses knew their work as well as the riders, and entered into the game as if their hearts were in it. The cows and calves by-and-by became considerably mixed, and the uproar made by the cows which had lost their progeny was deafening. The cows without calves were allowed to depart as they listed, and when released they set slowly off by one consent, grazing their way leisurely back to the particular part of the run from which they had been brought.

The neighbouring mountains echoed the din marking our return, slowly driving the cows and calves before us. In the rear of the mob an undue proportion of calves struggled and cried, and it was painful to witness the distress of their mothers as they frantically searched for the lost. The lowing of kine is a favourite article of the poet's stock, and would be one for the painter too, if he could transfer it to canvas. The bellowing of a hundred "milky mothers of the herd" in sore distress was quite another affair. Dogs barked, stock-whips cracked like pistol-shots, as the procession moved at the rate of two miles an hour along a sweet valley adorned with many a green bluff and cool ravine and creek, into which the herd plunged pell-mell, always increasing the number of bewildered little stragglers in the rear. In passing through the gates, which upon this run were employed as an improvement upon the cumbersome slip-rail, the number would be still further increased, by

reason of the crush and inevitable fate of the weak under such circumstances. A cow more agonized than she could bear would at times charge back, to be met by vigilant dogs and the stockman's whip, and despatched in hot haste into the ruck once more. The sun was dipping behind the ranges when the noisy collection was safely enclosed for the night in a small paddock near the branding-yards. The next day was devoted to branding, cutting, and ear-marking ; and having seen 140 head disposed of, the cup of my experience in those operations might be considered brimfull.

The run presented picturesque features, far removing it from the ordinary tameness of Australian landscape. Its grasses were abundant and fattening ; it possessed immense flats capable of growing corn and potatoes in any quantity. I saw a large patch of English potatoes that would not discredit Ireland herself ; and the maize was a picture of plenty. There were high ridges, in which wild horses and kangaroos abounded. They would be worth a chapter to themselves ; and I will only here mention, with reference to the former, that they are our friends the brombies, descended from valuable horses escaped from an old stud-farm, and that they are broken in without much difficulty. The horses that brought us up so splendidly, I may repeat, were all brombies, and so were most of the animals employed on the station.

Silver-leaf ironbark country is always in high repute for grazing. It is the prettiest type of Queensland pasture-land I have seen. The iron-bark proper is a big, black-trunked, hard wood of commercial value, but not elegant in appearance. The silver-leafed variety is more ornamental than useful. The trees upon this run were far apart ; they were small, the trunk seldom exceeding a foot in thickness, and they bore a branching head of full foliage, of the blue-green tint that gives them a name. There was no weariness to the eye in being amongst them, as with the common

eucalypti, and, there being no undergrowth, the sward was open and fresh. Upon the flats the usual gum-trees abounded, save where—another token of good land—the so-called apple-trees held possession. Upon the veritable mountain ridges of one corner of the run there were magnificent scrubs of bunya pine, to which the blacks periodically resorted, to feed upon the succulent kernels of the large cones. Roasted as the blacks only can roast them, they were as good as chestnuts.

There were, "more or less," as the pastoral advertisements always say, 7000 head of cattle upon the run. In the bull paddock there were sixty grand animals peacefully feeding, some of them sires imported at considerable expense. The stud Herefords were especially handsome, and in the heifer paddock you might pick out a dozen of their progeny fit for an English agricultural show. Many Australian graziers prefer the shorthorn. There were 1200 fat bullocks waiting better markets, besides the mob that were travelling down to Brisbane, a distance of 150 miles, at the rate of eight miles per day. The breeding cows were reduced during the drought of two years before, but there still remained 4500. The residue were steers and heifers.

The word paddock will not to the English reader convey an adequate idea of the area of the inclosures. The bullock paddock, for example, into the centre of which the herd had been driven for the butcher's drafting, contained 6000 acres, and was securely fenced in with the usual post and rails. And this was not the largest cattle-run in Queensland, though it was much above the average.

The noon-day rests at mustering expeditions were delightful. They were if possible on the banks of a creek, and under the shade of a group of trees. The bridle-reins were pulled over the head and passed round one of the stirrups, leaving the horses free to graze, and so well were they accustomed to their work and masters that they never

moved far from the camp fire, where the inevitable quart pot of tea was kept ready. So we sat around upon the grass; the piece of cold boiled beef and the loaf were passed from hand to hand, each sliced off what he wanted, and, with the cheap effective sauce of hunger, ate as hearty men who had earned a meal should eat. The *bonâ fide* workers wasted no time in lunching, but I could afford to lie face downwards upon the grass, the cicadas in all the trees in perpetual concert, and lazily ruminant upon the fascinations of pastoral life upon a run of this description, containing 280 square miles, for the most part beautiful and high-class grazing-country. In the evenings we spent fleeting hours at the whist-table or piano in the drawing-room, where the lady of the house, her daughter, and governess, made us agreeably acquainted with the softer side of station life.

New Year's Day fell during my visit, and we saw the old year out at a neighbouring station eighteen miles distant. It was a glorious ride, by lily-covered lagoons and across grass-covered plains, and the hospitable entertainment that awaited the visitors who came in from all directions was more the genial merrymaking of the olden times than the formal gathering of modern life. One young lady, reputed to be the happiest, merriest, best-tempered damsel of the district, had travelled seventy miles to be one of the party, and our host had driven half that distance to transfer her from the saddle to his buggy. A hearty, unceremonious welcome there was for every new-comer from host and hostess; the long table on the verandah, overlooking lake and plain as far as the eye could reach, groaned day and night with abundance; and another verandah hung around with flags made an irreproachable ball-room. We observed the time-honoured custom on the stroke of midnight, and separated, north, south, east, and west, after two days' genuine enjoyment, declaring that it had been good to be there.

The days that had intervened between our journey up and down having been without rain, the foaming, roaring currents had become ignoble creeks, showing us that in two fordings we had narrowly escaped plumping into holes. The brombies, driven in from the grass the previous night, were in fine spirits, and my friend, according to his custom, kept them going.

“There is less chance of accident; the horses like it better; and it is the only thing that makes a long journey tolerable,” he would say.

Our first pair shied at a dead dingo lying in the road. It was a remarkably fine specimen of the tawny native dog, but its bushy tail had been cut off by the slayer, who, upon producing it at the head-station, would receive a bonus of two figs of tobacco. As we passed by, an iguana crawled from the interior of the carcase, and hurried quickly up a tree. Down the mountain-roads we went at hard gallop, quite conscious that the giving way of a single buckle or bolt would in all probability roll us, very much mashed, into a rocky ravine. But, as my companion observed, “there’s nothing like keeping them going,” and it really did seem as if the plucky brombies steered better and ran freer when their blood was up.

On this trip we were not troubled with mosquitoes, nor in this mountainous district are they ever so troublesome as on the coast. Black duck, whistling duck, wood duck, spurwing plover, and curlew were plentiful, and for the first time I saw the squatter pigeon, a pretty little brown dove that derives its name from its habit of squatting on the ground. They were generally in pairs, and when disturbed, lazily flew into the nearest tree. The birds are so tame that the blacks knock them down by hurling their nullahs, and stockmen kill them with their whips.

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